WAR PHASES ACCORDING TO MARIA

RS. JOHN LANE

31.1.16

WAR PHASES
ACCORDING TO MARIA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

KITWYK: a Story. With numerous Illustrations by HOWARD PYLE, ALBERT STERNE, and GEORGE WHARTON EDWARDS. Crown 8vo.

THE CHAMPAGNE STANDARD. Crown 8vo.

THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT; OR THE SHADDOCK OR THE GRAPE FRUIT. How to Serve and How to Eat it. Fcap. 8vo.

ACCORDING TO MARIA. With 10 Illustrations and a Cover-Design by JOSEPH GOFTON. Crown 8vo., 6s.

TALK OF THE TOWN. Crown 8vo.

HONEY BEE. A Translation of ANATOLE FRANCE. With 12 full-page Coloured Illustrations, End-papers, Title-page, and Cover by FLORENCE LUNDBORG. Fcap. 4to.

MARIA AGAIN. Crown 8vo.

THE BODLEY HEAD

MARIA AND THE DUCHESS

WAR PHASES

ACCORDING TO MARIA

BY MRS. JOHN LANE

ILLUSTRATED BY A. H. FISH

LONDON: JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY MCMXVII

PRINTED BY WM. BRENDON AND SON, LTD., PLYMOUTH, ENGLAND

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE two first "War Phases" have already appeared in *Maria Again*, but I venture to include them here as they belong to this series, and at any rate afford a text for the witty and brilliant pencil of A. H. Fish.

A. E. L.

CONTENTS

			PAGE
I.	A War Phase . . .	1914	3
II.	On "Doing Something"	1915	19
III.	Zeppelin Dangers . .	1915	43
IV.	Maria's Political Opinions	1915	59
V.	Maria on Submarines .	1916	77
VI.	On the New Equality .	1916	99
VII.	Cardboard Friendship .	1916	117
VIII.	War Hens . . .	1916	137
IX.	Margarine and Society .	1916	157
X.	War Notice . . .	1916	179

ILLUSTRATIONS

Maria and the Duchess . . *Frontispiece*

TO FACE PAGE

A Young Thing in Six Flounces Collided with Maria 4

Mrs. Dill-Binkie as a Ministering Angel . 24

Zeppelin Dangers 44

Bing Loved to Wait on the Celebrated . 70

The Gallant Commander of the Submarine . 82

Cardboard Friendship 118

They Won't Lay 138

Queen Anne or Queen Victoria . . . 190

I

A WAR PHASE

I. A WAR PHASE

1914

I DISCOVERED Maria elbowing her way through a crowd of women craning their necks to look into a big plate-glass shop window in Oxford Street. It was heavily draped with black velveteen and other emblems of deep mourning that formed an appropriate background for an artistic display of sombre Christmas sweets in picturesquely overturned baskets decorated with huge black bows.

Even the chocolates were unable to escape the national mourning, and were all tied with black-and-white ribbons, and all the rest of the sweets were in black-and-white cardboard boxes.

"Touching, isn't it?" said Maria, much

moved. And at the same time I realised that there is a humour of a tragic kind, only, as I have said before, Maria has no sense of humour.

"I don't see why the sweets should go into mourning," I remonstrated. At which Maria looked at me with ineffable disdain, and intoned loftily, "Lest we forget," but interrupted her only quotation from the poets rather abruptly to annihilate an eager young thing in six flounces, white fox furs, Tango curls, a képi, and half a yard of bare, pink neck, who had accidentally collided with her in her efforts to see what was going on.

"Rude thing!" Maria cried indignantly, and swept past the Tango curls and the képi, and then, with the air of an early Christian martyr, gave her a secret poke with her elbows; and Maria's elbows are sharp.

A YOUNG THING IN SIX FLOUNCES COLLIDED WITH MARIA

"Weaker sex, indeed!" and she breathed hard, "I hope they have nothing weaker in the trenches." And she was so annoyed that she didn't speak again till we reached that famous emporium behind whose Arabian-night show-windows the sweetest things in black-and-white frocks, black-and-white boas, black-and-white hats, black-and-white shoes, and black-and-white petticoats prove how even tragedy may be utilised by the most perfect taste.

Maria was at once engrossed by the latest thing in war fashions, which the world knows is six yards of overskirt over what is apparently one concentrated trouser-leg.

"I was told it was to be a black-and-white year," and Maria gazed spellbound at an infinitesimal white képi that sported two dashing black cock feathers, and

proclaimed the accuracy of the unknown prophet.

"I should have said a black, black year," I remarked dubiously.

Here Maria gave way to low spirits; and no wonder, for, as she said bitterly, it was like her luck to have a revulsion of feeling in the fashions just when she had put her whole innocent trust in their keeping tight, and in that spirit she had replenished her wardrobe and so was now left stranded in tight things.

"And one can't wear those horrid tight things any more," she said, plunged in gloom, "they make one look so old-fashioned and wretched, and then everybody'll be wondering."

By which I gathered that to the new misery there is now added another, which is that, even if your heart is breaking, it must break in a skirt six yards wide, and

you're obliged to pause in your agony to have it tried on.

I was about to suggest to her that these days seemed more suitable for sackcloth and ashes, but she had turned away and said the sight of the window made her miserable, and we'd better go home by Tube.

On the way she invested in a ha'penny patriot, equally illustrious at the back for the latest thing in fashions and in front for the lightning changes of its headline thrills.

I must confess that Maria has, in common with other more or less illustrious persons, a singularly generous and detached way of regarding her country's enemies. She sometimes even refers to the one and —mercifully—only War Lord as the poor old Kaiser.

I have even heard her say that she

couldn't help feeling sorry for him, for should he ever want to go travelling again after the war—and he just loves to travel —where could he go to ? For, according to Maria, we should be sure to want to make it pleasant for him—but could we save him from feeling awkward ?

But Maria's soul was at present immersed in the new skirt, and she deplored the drastic dictates of fashion as I followed her into her dining-room, where she spread the ha'penny patriot on the table.

She said disconsolately that she didn't for a moment believe that the poor old Kaiser, who made his fashions as well as his cannons, would ever let his German ladies go in for all that floppiness now that he needed bread and things.

"Of course he loves 'em to be stylish," said Maria, "but somehow he can't help

their always being a bit behindhand, can he? For they are. He can't hurry 'em up like cannons.

"You remember they'd only just got comfortably settled in their 'straight-fronted' —and a 'straight-fronted' does hurt when you're stout," Maria added in parenthesis —"when we'd already gone in for the water-lily droop." And there's nothing so hard to learn, according to Maria, as to stick out gracefully in a new place.

"He'll probably give up trying to make them stylish for the present, and that'll give 'em a chance to breathe, poor things. But I do wish he'd stop their wearing plaids," she added plaintively.

"He was always great for style himself," Maria admitted, "and I'm sure that's the real reason he's fighting us. He's made up his mind to kill all the style out of us!" she cried tragically, "and I believe he hates

us more because we're smart than because we've got a navy.

"Very stylish himself with that moustache of his, and his chin. And knows just how to stand in a photograph—and when he's told to look pleasant mostly does. Really, you know, a very nice man," Maria assured me, with her usual strict sense of justice, "and such a good father!

"Only the other day he gave one of his boys two iron crosses, though what he wants with two, goodness knows. 'First and second class' they were. Sounds like a waiting-room, doesn't it?

"I should hate to wear a second-class myself and then meet a first-class," she added thoughtfully; "but, then, princes wear all their classes at once, and I suppose that's what makes them look so like pin-cushions when they've got 'em all on," she remarked rather critically.

She again turned the ha'penny patriot to his normal position—headlines trumpeting that the Kaiser had conferred on his son, Prince Eitel Friedrich, the Order "Pour le Mérite." For it seems we can't even now escape the foreign fashionable intelligence.

"So like a father," Maria said benevolently, and then descending to the strictly colloquial, added, "That's the fat one."

"I wonder what's his particular form of merit?" I asked, while she chased vainly through the columns of the ha'penny for further biographical details.

"I don't quite know," and she gave up the chase; "but it's one who either fell from his horse or had the mumps"—and she looked severely at me—"and either can be very dangerous.

"Poor dear Kaiser, he has his worries, and he's just like Samuel—so affectionate.

For ever since Diana married, Samuel's given her all her groceries for nothing.

"It's tea and cheese and things with Samuel, and crosses and merits with the poor old Kaiser; but the father's love is just the same. Anyhow, charity begins at home," and she raised her eyes to the ceiling with considerable feeling, and discovered a cobweb dangling gaily from the cornice. Maria stared at it as at an apparition.

"I shall have to give Potter notice!" she exclaimed, with deep indignation. "It's the second in two days! She seems to think because we're fighting for our national existence she might just as well give up dusting."

Whereupon she slowly detached her gaze from the cobweb and returned to the contemplation of the Kaiser's virtues as the blameless father of a family.

"Nobody can say he don't do his best for 'em," she continued, "making 'em generals and colonels, and giving 'em armies and soldiers and things like that to play with, just to keep 'em quiet and happy.

"Still, I can't help thinking what a worry they're sure to be to everybody for fear they'll get killed or something, and how glad the poor generals must be when they catch something that's safe," and Maria meditated on the undeserved sufferings of the Kaiser's harassed General Staff.

"So no wonder the poor Kaiser was glad enough to give him the Order of Merit for getting the mumps." And mumps, according to Maria, are much safer than trenches, or even storming to victory twenty miles behind the troops.

"And isn't it lucky for the poor old Kaiser that his crosses are all iron now

that times are so hard, and he has to give away such loads ?" Maria is nothing if not practical. But here she paused, confronted by a staggering problem.

"Gracious me!" and she held her breath, "I never thought of it before. But I do wonder how the poor old Kaiser ever got his ? You don't suppose"—and if ever there was *lèse-majesté* in the air it was at that awful moment—"you don't suppose he pinned it on himself ?"

There, it was out! Was it possible for the Imperial Source of all Honour to decorate himself for valour ?

And seeing that nobody else could, who did ?

We stared at each other aghast; and Maria, who is after all only human, was eager to believe the worst, when, to her obvious disappointment, I suddenly remembered to have heard that Royal babies are

born with things like that—they don't have to achieve them.

As an instance, I told her that only the other day at Brighton I met a three-year-old Hereditary Lord High Admiral in his perambulator with a Teddy-bear, and that he didn't even pretend to have command of the sea, though I saw him try his best to spit into it.

"But, of course," I explained to Maria, again gloomily steeped in the fashions, "if they fall from a horse or have the mumps, or anything else that's heroic, their papa gives them something extra."

Here Maria looked up with a desperate sigh: "I do say if we change our fashions in this hour of trial from tight things that no one can make over again to skirts six yards wide, or you're not in it, it only shows——"

"It only shows that we're bound to win,"

and I finished the sentence for her. "For, after all, Maria, it also takes a kind of heroism to try your best to look pretty even if your heart's breaking. It's only a woman's queer way of showing that she, too, is brave—just as our men are."

The next time I saw Maria she wore six flounces and a képi, and she showed more ankle than I considered absolutely justifiable in a grandmother.

II

"DOING SOMETHING"

c

II. "DOING SOMETHING"

1915

I MET Maria in Regent Street in her six flounces, képi, and Tango curls—of all things Tango curls, now they're ancient history!

She was in the deepest depression, and begged me to go to Fuller's with her and have an ice, for she was so worried. She did however rouse herself enough to say we could each pay for our share. So like Maria!

At the door she invested in the latest ha'penny illustrated, never dreaming of the stab prepared for her, inside. I followed her képi and six flounces upstairs, and we sat down by a window from where we could look up and down the

splendid street bathed in the sunshine of a May afternoon.

Only youth counts nowadays, so it was the apotheosis of youth. Below in the street beautiful young things in odd little hats with floating veils, and tiny shoes with the highest of heels, and accompanied by the smartest young officers in khaki and monocles, strolled along under the radiant sunshine, or paused to examine the treasures of Golconda in the glittering shop-windows.

"Will some of them remember this their last walk together?" I thought as two young things came out of a jeweller's. She was the loveliest of the lovely, and in her hand she held a little jeweller's parcel and looked radiantly into his handsome face as he smiled down at her. I could hear the click of his spurs on the pavement. A young figure in deepest mourning passed

and touched them like a shadow of sorrow, but they only looked into each other's eyes.

"Gather ye roses while ye may . . ."

A solitary old man with a black band around his arm shuffled wearily through the gay crowd, leaning on his stick and staring before him.

In deep depression of spirits Maria had ordered ices and chocolate éclairs.

"I hate sticky gloves!" and as she pulled hers off, I discovered that she was not only melancholy but cross. It's so difficult sometimes to distinguish between the two.

From an unseen orchestra "Tipperary" floated upstairs just as in the street the police stopped the traffic to let a battalion of young khaki swing through, a brown line that swept gaily into the distance where the street curves into Picca-

dilly Circus—on—on—but where to, God in His mercy alone knows.

Maria opened the ha'penny illustrated equally beloved in the kitchen and drawing-room. But her thoughts were occupied with other problems, and she dropped it again.

"The fact is," and she heaved a sigh out of the very foundations of her being, "you've really got to do something nowadays or you're not in it," and she paused and chilled her soul with a strawberry ice. Then I realised for the first time that there may be other agonies, but the old agony of not being in it is still ever present.

Maria stabbed an éclair, and then with her elbows on the table announced her contribution to the national sacrifice.

She said she felt she had to do something, she had therefore decided to be economical

in the hour of trial; so she had forbidden cocoa and lump-sugar to the servants.

Of course they had grumbled, and when she explained to them that their country expected a sacrifice from everyone they were impertinent enough to ask if they might sacrifice something they didn't like.

"So like them," said Maria, and lost herself for one tragic moment in the chocolate éclair.

I respected her gloom as she licked the vanilla cream from the corners of her mouth, and paused before I ventured to inquire the nature of her own contribution to the national sacrifice. She replied by asking if I had noticed that she still wore her Tango curls. I said I had and that I was rather surprised, Tango curls being in the nature of ancient history.

"Yes, I know"—Maria spoke as one who had suffered, and ate ice-cream with

some emotion—" but, you see, I paid two-and-sixpence a pair for them just before the war, and, as I owe it to my country to be economical, I've made up my mind to wear them out. Only sometimes I wonder," and Maria was positively assailed by doubt, " if it really shows ? "

I had to admit that, considering the immensity of the sacrifice, perhaps it didn't.

" It isn't the sort of thing," Maria said mournfully, " for which people's pictures are put in the papers," and she unfolded the ha'penny, " but I do say——"

Here however she paused as one stricken, her eye on the very middle of the page, and then she gasped, and no wonder ! For there in the place of honour usually reserved for royalty, or the common lot that pay, was not only Mrs. Dill-Binkie, but Mrs. Dill-Binkie as a Red Cross nurse in a uniform manifestly created by no less a one than " Lucile."

MRS. DILL-BINKIE AS A MINISTERING ANGEL

Wherever a red cross could be put a red cross had been put, and the very biggest one was just over the place where, according to Maria, she hadn't any heart, and her upturned eyes were shining, possibly with charity, but more likely with belladonna.

It took Maria quite a moment to recover, and she cried tragically, "There she is, and don't know any more about nursing than the cat—not so much, for Mrs. Dill-Binkie has never even had kittens! And to think she's already in the papers and hasn't had her uniform a week, and only had one convalescent and he ran away in two days.

"I know all about it!" Maria added mysteriously. "I know she had to wait three months for her uniform, for Lucile was so rushed making uniforms for duchesses who simply wouldn't wait they were in such a tearing hurry to start nursing. But as soon as she got her uniform she did hurry

up!" and Maria offered Mrs. Dill-Binkie the tribute of her admiration.

"For she had to board out Mr. Dill-Binkie before she could turn her house into a rest-cure for convalescent officers, the kind that need the comforts of home and are well enough to play bridge. And all in a week! Doesn't she look stylish in her uniform!" Maria acknowledged with her usual sense of justice.

"I met her in Piccadilly and she told me now that her uniform was ready she was, and she'd already had one convalescent with golden curls but he was off in two days —cured. As if I didn't know better!" and Maria sniffed.

"And the way the photographers rang the front-door bell all day long and asked to take her photograph surrounded by her nurses was most touching. Amateur nurses," she explained, "they have so

much more real feeling. They have a common one to do the work.

"Still, I am surprised to see her here already," and Maria sighed heavily, "but, of course, she paid for it." And she studied Mrs. Dill-Binkie in the shortest of skirts, the tallest of heels, the kind whose click is so particularly soothing to the suffering, and with something at her waist that looked like a rosary, only it wasn't a rosary but the very latest thing in bridge-markers at the end of a chain.

And on her head she wore a fetching snow-white veil, one of the sort that flops in the soup and catches in the door, but makes them all look like amateur nuns. Though of course they aren't nuns but just ministering angels who love to sit by the bedside of the suffering and stroke their hair and wash their faces and coo.

For, according to Maria, the science of

nursing consists entirely in stroking the sufferer's hair or washing his face. The only things so far the photographers had not asked permission to photograph were Mr. Dill-Binkie and the kitchen and the beetles in the kitchen. But these are of course prosaic details of no public interest.

Still, Maria is human, and so she added with a gloomy joy that she had heard that the amateur nurses were rebelling against always being photographed as surrounding Mrs. Dill-Binkie like humble and adoring satellites. They were neither humble nor adoring, and their uniforms cost just as much as hers, and so did their caps.

They complained that it was tiresome always to be photographed from left to right and never to be in the middle, and never to have a chance at a convalescent. For Mrs. Dill-Binkie, because she boarded out Mr. Dill-Binkie and contributed the

house, had insisted on always being in the middle of the photograph and on having the pick of the convalescents, so as to wash their faces and stroke their hair.

The only convalescent who so far had come, and that by mistake it turned out, declared to the common or garden nurse who did the hard work, and to whom he clung, that he didn't believe he had any face left, for it had been nearly all washed away.

But of course as there were so many nurses and only one convalescent, he couldn't possibly go round. And being a young giant with the kind of curly, fair hair of which most men are ashamed, they had nearly driven him mad, for they all sat by him in turn and perpetually stroked his defenceless head.

It was Mrs. Dill-Binkie who drove them away and undertook this heavy task

herself. And that finished the golden-haired sufferer, for the very next night he disappeared lightly clothed in his pyjamas, bedroom slippers, and dressing-gown. But he left a note to say that he was eternally grateful, but not to search for him as he had gone back to the trenches ; for he was homesick for the trenches.

"Of course," and Maria sighed, "she's in it, for she's got her uniform and her picture's in the papers, and she's got a convalescent home even if she hasn't any convalescents."

I had to admit that Mrs. Dill-Binkie was indeed enjoying the first fruits of benevolence. She'd had a patient for two days and washed his face and stroked his hair, so if anyone had a right to wear a uniform she had.

"Of course," Maria cried in despair, as she looked about, so to speak, for other

fields of active benevolence, "there are mufflers—but one can't get any credit for making mufflers now that even Board-school children do 'em, can one?"

I agreed with Maria, and went even further, for I added that mufflers had become the innocent instruments of a new torture. That at a concert I had seen a female patriot, with a cast-iron sense of duty, spoil the enjoyment of everybody about by knitting a muffler in that secret sort of way that shatters one's nerves; and nobody dared to remonstrate for fear of being denounced as unpatriotic. And after having knitted two inches in two hours she retired from the hall with a proud step, like the mother of the Gracchi, and a self-conscious sense of duty nobly performed.

I have even seen another patriot produce a muffler out of a bag during church and

be even more a reproach to the congregation who didn't knit than the sermon. And I agreed with Maria when she declared that worthy and useful though the muffler is, there is something about its homely virtues which seems to repel the ha'penny Press on the look-out for the picturesque.

"The fact is," I said to Maria, gloomily chasing the last drop of ice-cream around her plate, "the muffler is the line of least resistance. It is the able-bodied female's compromise with conscience. Do less and you don't do anything."

"Well, I've got to do something!" and Maria nearly groaned. "I've been hoping Lady Tippett would ask me to be on her committee."

"A committee for what?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Maria replied disconsolately, "but she knows I'm dying to belong, only she won't ask me now we've

given up our seats in her pew. Isn't it mean of her?

"I'd just love to be on a committee, for they never expect you to do anything. And even if you wanted to they wouldn't let you; but just to be on one would make me feel that I was really doing something," and Maria sighed painfully.

"For you have no idea how it makes me feel when people ask me if I'm doing something—and it would be grand if I could say I was on a committee. Some people are so lucky about doing things," Maria sighed.

"There's Mrs. Fauntleroy-Jones; she went and put a cottage in order for Belgians on her East Coast place, but before she could get a single one the police shut it up for fear of Zeppelins. Wasn't she lucky? And now it's touching to hear her tell of all the things she meant to do for them had they let her. She's so charitable!

"But I really must be going," and she put on her gloves and gathered together her bag and her sunshade. "The way those waitresses won't look at one!" and Maria bored through the flat back of a young person in a cap with a glance like a gimlet, until obeying some telepathic command she turned and approached.

"Sevenpence apiece," and Maria solved the mathematical problem on the slip, "and tuppence for her, though why, goodness only knows!" she remarked as she left the tribute on the table.

"I think," and Maria roused herself from deep thought as one who has cast the die, "I think I shall try a Belgian," and she waited for a moment to let the announcement sink in. "For I do not believe any nation can be more ungrateful than the English!" and she swept past the young

person made richer by tuppence, who ignored us completely.

"Did she look grateful or did she even smile?" Maria exclaimed. I admitted that she did not look grateful nor did she smile, but as I pointed out, it is very difficult to measure just how much gratitude to give for tuppence.

"Yes," said Maria as one registering a solemn vow, "I'll ask Lady Tippett to get me a Belgian. She's such an old busybody I feel sure she can get me one, even if she won't ask me to be on her committee.

"Anyhow now I've made up my mind," and Maria trod Regent Street as one uplifted, "I really feel I'm doing something.

"Besides," and she obviously argued with herself, "it won't be all waste, for I'll tell Lady Tippett to get me one with good

manners and who's able to cook—for I'm told all Belgians can cook, even the noblest. So she'll probably be able to teach cook a new kind of sauce for cauliflower, and that'll be a mercy.

"Then she can do the sewing, for they say they're great at sewing; and the rest of the time she can teach me French. She can sleep in the box-room. I really can't tell you," Maria declared with emotion, "how much happier I feel now I'm doing something! Only, of course, I must have one with the right French accent.

"I'll get Diana to come and talk to her. She'll know, for she had an extra term in French at school. I thought at the time it was just waste, but it only shows you never can tell.

"I'll let you know as soon as I've got a Belgian," and Maria climbed into a 'bus at Swan & Edgar's with an air of being

completely exhausted by her efforts in the cause of benevolence.

. . . . .

Two days after, the telephone bell rang tumultuously. As soon as I raised the receiver I realised that Maria, so far as it is in her nature to cling, was clinging to the other end.

" I've had such a disappointment," she moaned across the telephone.

" What about ? "

" About my Belgian ! I telephoned to Lady Tippett and she said she had just what I wanted. The sweetest thing, only she was a countess. Did I mind her being a countess ?

" I said I didn't mind her being a countess," Maria assured me with her usual lofty outlook, " for I felt certain then that she'd have a good accent, and so we'd

all take lessons from her, even Samuel. And I waited till just now for Lady Tippett to call and say when she was coming." Here the telephone bore witness to Maria's indignation.

"And she's just been, and what do you think she said?" and she breathed hard by telephone.

"She said the very first thing the countess asked was whether we'd ever been presented at Court! And what do you think Lady Tippett replied—old cat!

"She said she was obliged to tell the truth that we hadn't been because Samuel was a grocer. Wasn't it wicked of her, when she knows that Samuel is entirely wholesale? And as if," Maria telephoned in anguish, "even a retail grocer had never been presented!

"Anyhow she said that the countess said she couldn't possibly go to people who

hadn't been presented at Court. So that's off!

"But I don't believe a word of it! And it's only because we gave up her pew," and I felt by telephone that Maria was making a heroic effort to pull herself together.

"Anyhow I wanted you to know that I really can't do anything more for the Belgians, I'm so hurt. So I've made up my mind that as soon as I'm rested, for I'm quite worn out with it all, I'm going to work for England. And I can't tell you what a comfort it is to feel I'm really doing something, for to-morrow I mean to begin on a muffler. G'bye!"

And the telephone relapsed into an abrupt silence, for Maria had hung up the receiver.

III

ZEPPELIN DANGERS

III. ZEPPELIN DANGERS

1915

THE first Zeppelin victim I ever met was Maria's Samuel. I happened to ring Maria's front-door bell at the tail-end of the catastrophe and found her with her hat on her head, and on her face a kind of frozen agony as she watched innumerable rivulets of brown water playfully circulating across the drawing-room ceiling, which was in a shocking condition.

"Maria, what has happened?"

"Samuel," she began, and pinched her lips.

"What?" I gasped, for Samuel is now a "special" and guards Hampstead Heath three times a week, and you never can tell.

"Speak, Maria!" I entreated, and Maria complied and took most of the drama out of the situation. So like her!

"You remember the three galvanised iron pails on the landing outside our door, in which I keep water for the Zeppelins?" Here she paused, and I prepared myself for something very bad.

"Well, Samuel—early this morning when he came home from Hampstead," and Maria positively swelled with gloomy triumph after the manner of prophets, "if he didn't forget and fall over all three!" and she rather implied that he had done it on purpose.

"I was asleep, just dreaming I'd gone to call on Mrs. Dill-Binkie in an aeroplane—a silly dream, for she owes me a call—when the most dreadful noises woke me up—clatters and groans and water pouring over everything, so I felt

ZEPPELIN DANGERS

positive the Zeppelins had come through at last.

"But I didn't lose my presence of mind," Maria assured me in her most superior way, "not a bit of it, though I couldn't find my respirator. I'd put it by my bed in my wash-basin every night for three months, with a gallon jug of soda water to moisten it. And to think I forgot it the only time something happened!

"And wasn't it a mercy it was Samuel and not a Zeppelin? But of course I didn't know. So I'm rather proud I kept my presence of mind and got my best hat and put it on. Then I rushed out and there lay Samuel across the three pails. And when I got him up he had a lump on his forehead such as I never did! And saying the most awful things in the most awful way! I wouldn't have believed it of him! And now he's in bed all black and blue.

"But it is a mercy he isn't expected on the Heath till Wednesday, for by that time he'll have turned green and yellow, so he won't be noticed in the landscape. And isn't it like Samuel to fall over things? So now we're obliged to have the ceiling done and just, too, when times are so bad!"

It was like Maria to lay the blame on Samuel, and ignore the fact that in her patriotic concession to the national economy she keeps the house in such impenetrable darkness that her galvanised anti-Zeppelin pails distributed along the passages are really two dozen galvanised iron death-traps for the unwary.

"I'm waiting for the man to come about the ceiling," she explained. "I had to go for him myself. Don't you want to come and see Samuel? He's dreadfully stiff and he aches, but I don't want him to feel

lonely, and so I run in every little while to amuse him. There's nothing like a woman in a sick-room, is there ? So soothing !

"Of course it isn't really a sick-room, for he isn't what you'd call sick. He says he doesn't believe a Zeppelin could hit harder than a galvanised iron pail. We're insured against Zeppelins, and if this isn't Zeppelins I'm sure I don't know what is ! So I do hope we'll get the ceiling and Samuel's sufferings out of somebody."

What I saw of Samuel gave me a terrible shock. For what wasn't invisible was covered up by damp brown paper, except in the middle of his forehead where there was a horrid red expanse. The prevailing smell was vinegar. I fell back and clutched Maria.

"Oh, that ! That's nothing. That's only a piece of steak to take down the swelling. I thought I'd try home remedies first

because of the ceiling. We've really got to be economical."

Here she let herself down on the edge of Samuel's bed, which rocked until, as I gathered from his groans, he suffered all the horrors of a sea voyage without any compensating joys.

"His head's better, but he can't read," Maria explained to me across her shoulder. "Do sit down! We've come to cheer you up, Samuel. Does the steak feel comfortable, darling?"

Samuel groaned.

"He's thinking of the ceiling," Maria interpreted.

"Oh, do go away!" a voice moaned from behind the brown paper.

"I must say, Samuel, to hear you one would suppose I'd put those pails there on purpose for you to fall over," and I cannot hope to reproduce the stately reproach in

Maria's voice. "You know I only bought them to save you, for you wouldn't buy any yourself; and what's more, I paid for them out of the housekeeping, and I showed you the bill. So I don't think you're a bit grateful considering all I've done for you."

"Go away, do!" Samuel repeated monotonously.

"Besides, you can't say you haven't been careless. You have. Dreadfully. You knew the pails were there. How often I've warned you, I don't know. I even made you put a knot in your handkerchief to remind you, I was so sure you'd do it!" and Maria spoke not without triumph.

"But sometimes I do wish I were a bit selfish and only thought of myself," she intoned loftily, and I could see by the working of her flat chest that she was, so to speak, pumping up red-hot coals to heap on Samuel's head.

"For if I'd done what I really wanted to I should have taken the money and got myself a grey feather boa at Selfridge's I've been dying for, but I thought of you," and Maria sniffed pathetically, "and so I went down to their kitchen things and bought two dozen of their best galvanised iron pails instead.

"It isn't for me to say so, but if I don't, nobody else will, but I've always sacrificed myself for my family, though I sha'n't be appreciated"—here Maria paused for dramatic effect, and then added in a hollow voice—"until it's too late."

Samuel groaned.

"But it isn't only pails," Maria added with an increased sense of injury, "but when I think of the respirators I've bought and all out of the housekeeping and fearfully dear! For I mean to save you, Samuel, even if you won't." And there

was about Maria a *je ne sais quoi* of a Roman matron. "You know I got a perfectly beautiful one for you at Shepherd's Bush—now didn't I, Samuel?"

But Samuel only sighed heavily.

"You remember what I told you about the assistant—such a nice young man, more like a brother than an assistant—who said he wouldn't wish to alarm me for worlds, but he felt it his duty to tell me that if I bought any respirators but theirs, even if I wasn't blown up I'd be sure to be set on fire, for British enterprise was now making them of celluloid.

"But, as I said to him," Maria remarked with her usual sense of justice, "it's nice to hear we're so enterprising. And though they were two-and-six I bought his respirators for everybody but cook, and I only got her a shilling celluloid one somewhere else, for she's given notice, so I don't care.

But when I think of the ceiling and Samuel and the respirators and the prescriptions I do feel that Zeppelins are really too trying!"

Still, according to Maria, although it is very nice that we are so enterprising sometimes, she thinks we are possibly too enterprising. She herself was a sufferer from too much enterprise. That Zeppelins were trying she had to admit, but it is her experience they are not the only things that are trying.

She could not, for instance, hope to describe what she had herself suffered from anti-Zeppelin gas-bomb prescriptions. For every day there were new ones in all the papers, and because she meant to save her family at whatever expense, no sooner did she read them than she had them all made up, one after the other, so's to be ready.

"For when it comes to doing," and she turned an eye of reproach on Samuel invisible, "I always did and I always will." So because of her there were now in Samuel's study—so called because, as I have said somewhere else, that's where he keeps his boots and his whisky—thirty-four bottles of anti-Zeppelin gas-bomb mixture, each announced to be the official one.

It was only that very morning she had heard on the best authority—"my grocer, a very superior man," she remarked in parenthesis—that most of these prescriptions in which Britain puts her trust are dreadful poisons prescribed by German spies who have taken consulting rooms in Harley Street on purpose to kill us.

"Isn't it too awful for words!" Maria cried in deepest depression, "especially now that they're all mixed up and paid for!"

"Must you go, Maria?" a voice as from the tomb moaned urgently. It was Samuel's.

"Oh, dear no! I'm waiting for the man about the ceiling," Maria replied in stately surprise.

"I've such a headache," Samuel groaned.

"I'll get you a headache powder," said Maria, for she really has a feeling heart when she has time.

Presently she was back with something in a tumbler, and before Samuel could protest he had swallowed it.

"Feel better, darling?"

"Great Scott, what is it?" and Samuel choked and struggled up, a terrible spectacle of damp brown paper and steak.

"Only a cold-cure thing, dearest," Maria replied firmly. "I thought I'd give it to you as I couldn't find the headache powder, and I felt sure you ought to take something."

Mercifully Samuel did not say what he was about to say, for just then the door opened and Potter appeared in official starch.

"If you please, madam," she announced in a flat voice, "the man's here about the ceiling and he says it's got to come down or it'll fall, and the chemist 'as sent the stuff for the Zeppelins. The prescription made five gallons and they had to get a stone jar on purpose, or they'd a-sent it before. The bill's twelve-and-six and the man's waiting."

For a moment Maria stared as if confronted by a ghost instead of an earthly parlourmaid.

Then she spoke: "I ordered it last week and quite forgot! And all that for Zeppelins and just when I need a new umbrella!"

I may be permitted to draw the veil until quarter to five the following Monday, when

just as I was adapting a respirator for Terry, who watched the proceedings with his pink tongue out and one ear cocked, Maria dragged herself in and sank exhausted on the sofa.

All she said was "How do?" and then "If I'd only waited!"

"Waited for what?" I urged as she gave herself up to gloom.

"Sales," and Maria turned on me an extinguished eye. "Sales are on to-day, and respirators are all marked down to half-price."

IV

MARIA'S POLITICAL OPINIONS

IV.

MARIA'S POLITICAL OPINIONS

1915

MARIA is, so to speak, politically distracted. From 11.30 to 12.30 she is nearly an anarchist and mad against the Government. For that is the time Juke takes Samuel out in the bathchair for an airing because of his Zeppelin injuries, and then Maria's opinion of the Government is simply too dreadful.

For Government has gone back on its sacred word and treated its solemn promise, on an insurance form, as a mere scrap of paper, and that after Maria had persuaded Samuel to insure with it against Zeppelin dangers.

For, as she reasoned gloomily, what were the three galvanised iron pails, which she

had bought at a bargain at Selfridge's, but Zeppelin dangers as they stood filled with water outside her bedroom door? For without Zeppelins she would have required no pails.

So when Samuel came home late one night from special constabling on Hampstead Heath and groped his way through the gloom in which Maria loyally shrouds her establishment, he so far forgot the domestic geography as to fall over all three, to his and the drawing-room ceiling's great damage.

And Maria, with a presence of mind which does her infinite credit, was no sooner face to face with the disaster than she posted a claim for Zeppelin damages to Government and stuck on a stamp before she had even soothed Samuel's bruises with brown paper and vinegar.

For, she said with reason, what were

Samuel's sufferings but Zeppelin sufferings ? And while she waited for a reply she came early every morning and wasted my time while she calculated what she would get out of it.

For it is characteristic of Maria that she looked on Samuel's injuries as a direct interposition of Divine Providence to enable her to get a seal musquash coat for which her soul longed and which Samuel had refused to give her. And the longer Government delayed replying the greater grew her expectations, until she persuaded herself that she might yet get a Russian sable out of Samuel's sufferings, and there might possibly be enough left to do over the drawing-room ceiling.

So when at last Government's reply did come—in print and with a priceless coat of arms—and announced briefly that it declined to class Samuel's sufferings under

air-raid sufferings, Maria became positively bitter, and when she called—at once—she said she could tell me some dreadful things about the Government—so dreadful that before she said a word she opened the door to see if anyone was listening.

And she quite whispered that she had it on the best authority, though what it really was I never knew, for just then she asked me for a cup of tea. And while I poured it out she studied the cake and remarked that she could see with half an eye that it was war cake.

"Glacé cherries," she added in her superior way, "are so cheap and fill up so that I should suppose you could afford to put in three or four more now we're spending five millions a day on the war." Whereupon she cut herself a slice, which I can only describe as an ante-bellum slice.

As she took a bite she said that the

way servants wouldn't be patriotic was simply too dreadful.

"I wanted to put 'em all on margarine just to make 'em feel that they were doing their bit for their country, but, if you'll believe it, cook said that if I did they'll all give notice," and Maria chewed in silence, patriotically depressed.

"Juke says"—and then I became aware that Maria is now given to quoting Juke too much—"it palls." But it is her concession to the spirit of the times to accept the point of view of the lowly.

She is, so to speak, Juke's disciple from 11.30 to 12.30 as he draws Samuel through Kensington Gardens. While Samuel feeds the ducks by the Serpentine Juke retires to a near bench and wipes the interior of his "Trilby"—once Samuel's—and as Maria hovers near he gives vent to the most virulent denunciation of the

Government—positively anarchistic—which touches an answering chord in Maria's bosom because of the seal musquash.

It is Juke's one longing to have it out with Asquith. He yearns to do Asquith's job for him if only for a day, just to show him how to do it. He even goes so far as to offer to do Kitchener's, and backs himself to get together a regiment of fighting bathchair-men that shall even stagger the "Keeser."

"It don't take eddication," said Juke, and blew his nose on a red bandana that had long ago gone into mourning; "it takes brains, and that ain't the same thing by a long shot. The eddication the war's killed and nothin' to show for it!

"Why, a policeman I knows says most of the burglars in town 'ave gone to the Front, and a finer lot of chaps 'e wouldn't wish to see, and so 'andy with their tools

and so ready to give the 'Uns a crack on the 'ead. And, mind you, they do it without eddication.

"So I says, mem, eddication ain't in it any more, and I'm agin it, though I once bath-chaired a gentleman chockfull of it, by name of 'Erbert Spencer, who lived in Bayswater, same's you, only in the philosophic line.

"And if you'll believe it, mem, 'e wouldn't pay me five shillings, though I 'ad to put an extra board in me chair for 'is game leg every day for three months, and 'im a philosopher and loving 'is fellow-man. So I quit, for I 'adn't any need of 'im, but 'e 'ad of me.

"It took 'im five months to think it over, and then 'e sends for me and pays up, and says 'e thought I was right though uneddicated. So we made it up and I bath-chaired him as long as ever 'e was 'ere.

"Now I says if 'e 'adn't 'ad too much eddication 'e'd 'ave paid up at once, but 'e

'ad that kind of overgrown mind that it took 'im five months to make it up.

"Ever since then I've been dead set agin eddication. I don't say it don't give an uncommon sense, but it don't give common sense, and it's common sense what does the job. And I say Government is too chock-full of eddication.

"To my way of thinking, a few of them burglars at the Front, who don't waste time making up their minds, would be the right fellars in Government, just to make things 'um. Government's too polite by 'alf, too much in the slap me cheek line and I'll turn you t'other.

"If you'd been a German, mem, if you'll excuse the hinsult of the idea, you'd 'ave 'ad them furs as quick as winkin', just to keep you friendly, but as you're only Hinglish you won't get 'em. That's Government and I'm agin it."

And Juke played on Maria's emotions as on a concertina, and she answered to his lightest touch, and breathed hard.

She saw through his eyes—rather red and watery—and acknowledged the need of the strong heart of a super-burglar in Government to tone it up, and she was possessed of a patriotic desire to demand an interview for Juke from Mr. Asquith, just to give him an idea what Juke would do if *he* were Prime Minister.

She was full of it when I met her on her way to the grocer's.

"I'm going to Bing's to order some washing-soda," said Maria, and added, not without pathos, "it's the only thing that I can still buy for a penny a pound, so I get it once in a while just to keep my spirits up. Come 'long."

Maria put a shilling on the counter, and demanded haughtily, six pounds of washing-

soda. Bing, an ingratiating tradesman, hastened to a cubby-hole where he kept his till and emerged with sixpence change; and then with his hands lightly balanced on the counter he gave voice to a criticism of the new order of things.

"I'll send the soda as soon's I can catch a lad, but"—and he was manifestly discouraged—"they are that presuming these days that if you'll excuse my saying so"—and he coughed behind his hand with great refinement—"I'm dead tired of the young and the airs they puts on. If I wanted young 'eroes, I could get 'em by the dozens, but as for an ordinary errand boy, he ain't to be 'ad."

"I'd carry it home," Maria said, with the latest thing in humility, "but six pounds——"

"I'd sooner take it myself," the worthy grocer assured her, "and I'm that longing

for peace that it seems to me sometimes as if I couldn't wait.

"But it ain't only to beat the 'uns, though we've got to do that first, but it's also just to put the young into their proper place. It'll be a blessed day when I can give a young one a good smack behind and feel I ain't injuring twenty shillings a week—for that's the least they ask. Why, years ago a decent country body'd kep' a family of twenty on less.

"I know the Government's got a mighty hard row to hoe to beat the 'uns; but when it's done—and it'll be done—I want 'em to just turn their attention here and give a lot of 'orse-racing and billiard-playing slackers, and young ones who ought to be running errands instead of wasting their time trying to become 'eroes, something what for.

"Wherever do they get the uncivil little

brats who throw tickets at one at the Tubes, and some of them sour, perty gals doing war-work ?

"I say they all ought to pass an exam. in manners before they get their billets. I wish I was Mr. Asquith for just a day ; I'd show him how to do it ! But there, I'm sure he does the best he can—he can't see to everything. Anyhow, there ain't anybody else who'll do better than he's done ! "

But just then over Maria's face there gathered a storm-cloud, and I felt that the seal musquash and the drawing-room ceiling had obtruded themselves on her memory, and Bing's praise of the Government left her more than cold—icy.

She was about to turn her back on him with a last frosty recommendation to send the washing-soda at once, when he rubbed his hands together in abject humility, and

BING LOVED TO WAIT ON THE CELEBRATED

mercifully remarked to her profile, "If you'll excuse my taking the liberty, Madam, but I do just love to wait on the Celebrated."

I never saw so miraculous a change. Maria's profile, temporarily of stone, thawed to wax, and from wax it melted to universal love, and she quite wriggled with gratification as she smiled down at the astute Bing. I really couldn't believe my ears! If he meant Maria, *why* did he mean Maria? Or did he mean me?

But I saw that he really meant Maria by the admiring way he stared at her. And she liked it so much—she did, really—that she fluted to him an order to send her a tradesman's book, for she had decided to deal with him, and wished to pay weekly.

He stood on the doorstep watching Maria undulate down the street the way

the Celebrated do when they feel the eyes of the world upon them.

And I was mystified, and said so. Why take groceries from Bing when Samuel is wholesale and as a husband provides them free of charge ?

" They won't cost any more, for he buys them from us, and I shall get them at trade price. Besides, I want to encourage him, for he is so superior ; anyhow, I shan't buy much from him. But ain't his talk interesting, and so true ?

" And it is nice to hear someone praise Government these days. I wish Asquith could hear him ! I've half a mind to write and ask him to see Bing. He'd be so pleased to hear what Bing thinks of him. For even a Prime Minister needs to be encouraged." I thought this was very broad of Maria.

" Of course when Bing said he loved to

wait on the Celebrated "—and Maria looked at me as if she expected me to dispute her claim—" he meant me ; it was very gratifying."

I'm sure I don't know why Maria should class herself among the Celebrated, except that the Celebrated can be as rude as they please, and so can Maria. But of one thing I am sure, and that is that Bing's sphere is not groceries, but the higher diplomacy, for Maria has traded with him ever since.

And even if Juke still moulds her political opinions from 11.30 to 12.30, in fact until Samuel has so far recovered from his Zeppelin injuries as to trust himself in a 'bus, I always know where she has been when she takes a rosy, lenient view of Mr. Asquith, although he broke faith with her and deprived her of the seal musquash and a restored drawing-room ceiling.

For then I know she has been com-

muning with Bing, who recognises the Celebrated as soon as he sees them, and in whose society she braces up her soul with memories of the past by ordering twelve pounds of washing-soda, still mercifully to be had for a shilling.

V

MARIA ON SUBMARINES

V. MARIA ON SUBMARINES

1916

PERHAPS you would like to know why Dick now calls Maria in private "The First Lord of the Admiralty"? I'll tell you. I met her at Selfridge's at the underwear. She was examining white woollen spencers, and pulling them out like an accordion, while the presiding young sales-lady was rapidly fading to the pea-green of utter exhaustion. She had on an extra smart hat and exhaled superiority, and greeted me with an accent she uses when she feels socially select; it is a cross between the East End and Oxford. I think she invented it.

"You'll never guess where I've been," she announced; and I was glad I didn't try, for she didn't wait for an answer.

"I've been to Dover;" and she paused dramatically, and then added, with an air of patronage, "I've been down in a submarine."

It was the one thing I had not expected of Maria, and I was perfectly stunned. So was the sales-lady, who at once changed to a creature with a beating heart and an open mouth, the commercial aloofness all melted out of her.

Maria explained that Dick had taken her instead of Diana, who couldn't leave the twins. Now the twins are brand-new, and Dick is their father, and Maria's Diana is their mother, and, as Maria remarked not unreasonably, she didn't wish to say a word against the twins, but they were most inconsiderate about their meals. But here, having got the sales-lady and myself worked up to the last degree of tension, Maria switched off abruptly again to the under-

wear and examined another spencer with a penetrating eye.

"And that makes me think," and she held it up, "whoever was Herbert Spencer, anyhow?"

For a moment I groped wildly after her train of thought, and then it occurred to me, like an inspiration, that the underwear in question had stirred the chords of memory. It had.

"Looking at it reminded me," she explained.

"He was a very great man," I began, when Maria, never gifted with patience, interrupted to say, "And did they name it after him, or was he the first to make 'em?"

"He did neither, Maria. He was a famous philosopher."

"Is that all? Then why Juke is for ever talking about him I can't imagine, except

that he bath-chaired with Juke and lived in Bayswater. But I wouldn't have Juke think I didn't know."

The fact is, Juke, who bath-chaired Samuel after his Zeppelin injuries, sustained by falling in the dark over three galvanised-iron pails Maria keeps outside her bedroom door as a protection—but I have already described that tragic episode—uses his celebrated patron's name as an introduction to new customers and to inspire respect.

That he failed signally with Maria was probably because she had never heard of that great man. But it was only when we met at the underwear that the chords of memory were stirred, and she inquired. And I'm afraid she would have been much more impressed if the celebrated Spencer really had invented the article which so deceptively bears his name.

"And is that all he was?" Maria observed. For, so she understood, a philosopher's only stock-in-trade is words, and words she considered about the cheapest thing going.

"And now I suppose every time I wear it I shall think of him," she remarked as she bore away a spencer that had triumphantly sustained her eagle scrutiny.

It was in this way that Maria was, so to speak, introduced to the higher philosophy. However, she again mercifully switched off to submarines, and suggested that we should go up to the restaurant, and while we had a real American oyster stew—which, in a way, is a nautical dish—she'd tell me all about it.

"It's what America and Selfridge's are famous for," she explained, but meant the stew. For once Fame was justified.

And while the serving young lady filled her soup-plate, Maria exclaimed, "Such an experience!" and seemed quite thrilled —though she paused to say, as she studied the retreating back of the young person, "And isn't it nice to go to a place where they hook-and-eye themselves up properly behind? It gives one so much more confidence in the kitchen!"

I agreed with this subtle observation while she chased an oyster round her plate and meditated over it as it lay in her spoon, as if it were a link with a beautiful memory. Then she looked up and said, quite, quite simply? "I sat on a torpedo."

I was chasing an oyster of my own, but Maria's announcement transfixed me. I dropped my spoon, and all I could say was, "Where?"

"In the submarine, of course. You don't suppose in a 'bus!"

THE GALLANT COMMANDER OF THE SUBMARINE

I overlooked Maria's rudeness because of her daring heroism, and gasped, "Why?"

Then with both elbows on the table Maria looked at me across the rim of her soup-spoon and replied, quite unconscious of heroism, "Because I was tired."

I had to admit the novelty of Maria's attitude towards torpedoes.

"Of course I first asked the Commander if I might, for I was so afraid of hurting it. He was such a darling, with navy-blue eyes and lovely brass buttons," and she looked dreamily at nothing in particular, as if reminded of a tender something.

But she couldn't pretend with me; I knew better. For the Navy, though notoriously tender-hearted, wouldn't dare to flirt with a grandmother, although she doesn't look it, in the presence of a critical son-in-law.

"And he said I might, if I wasn't afraid

of grease, for that," she explained in a far-off voice, " is the only danger."

I must say I was dreadfully disappointed ; but as I still hoped for a thrill, I asked how far the submarine went down.

" Went down ? " she retorted. " A submarine go down with me in it ? I rather think not ! It didn't go down at all—it was anchored. What do you take me for ? "

" Oh ! " I said very coldly.

" I did quite enough," and she was obviously nettled, " for first thing they did they rowed me to what looked more like a whale than anything, and then I had to scramble on a deck no bigger than a plank, and I know the way my feet showed was perfectly dreadful.

" I wouldn't have minded if I'd had on silk stockings and my patent leathers. But I didn't know. One really can't go on a submarine in anything else. And Dick

was so impertinent, for he said I was wonderful, considering my age."

I felt for Maria. So far as I could make out, the one ameliorating circumstance was the gallant Commander who assisted her through a trap-door and down such a steep ladder that she shut her eyes tightly, and when she opened them she found herself encircled by the arm of that heroic officer, who sustained her while she recovered her footing.

The scene that burst on her sight Maria described—in an outburst of poetic rapture for which I had never given her credit—as more like a Christmas pantomime than anything else in real life. It was all glitter, just like the Cave of Jewels Sinbad the Sailor discovered at Drury Lane, only more so.

She really couldn't say a word, she was so dazzled. She described it as the strangest room, miles long, with a point in front, and

the walls just one glitter, what with brass shining and electric-lamps burning, quite regardless of war economy. And it was so narrow that it was simply impossible to fall across, and the ceiling so low that her feather was just crushed.

In short, it was an experience such as she never did!

"And the tidiness of it!" Maria cried in rapturous retrospect, "and everything fastened to something." But as she contemplated the universal dazzle, the one overpowering thought that filled her mind as a housekeeper was: "Whoever did all that polishing?"

In the presence of this problem she nearly forgot her feather until the gallant Commander, with delicate sympathy, led her to the only place in a submarine where feathers may be said to have a chance—under the conning-tower.

He explained the periscope, and Maria, being nothing if not practical, realised at once what a boon it was destined to be to the family circle when attached to the front-door to enable one to recognise an undesirable caller in time to say "Not at home." She was deeply impressed by the future of the periscope.

Maria's only criticism of the submarine was that it didn't seem quite as cosy as it might be. But that of course could be altered. She missed a tea-table and a nice "comfy" sofa. She didn't even see a chair, and she was dead tired, and she felt just as if she had been caught in a gold spider-web, what with miles of brass pipes, and all sorts of weird brass things.

The only things she could see to sit on were eight great silver rolls, pointed in front and of course shining like everything—such was her scientific description—and for a moment

she thought they might possibly be the latest thing in sea furniture ; but just then the blue-eyed Commander introduced them gaily as his heart's treasure—his torpedoes.

And that was the historic moment when Maria asked if she might sit down on one, she was so tired. As I have said before, Maria has no sense of humour.

"And do you know what I thought of as I sat there ?" she asked pensively.

I said I didn't ; how could I ?

"I thought of Tompkins," said Maria.

Now to think of Tompkins at the supreme moment when one is sitting on a torpedo ! I felt Maria's thoughts might have taken a more sublime flight. For Tompkins is Maria's housemaid, and she has a mania for scrubbing as other people have for writing poetry.

"I could almost see her polishing the torpedoes." Maria spoke with feeling.

"I thought I'd do my bit and offer her to him for general cleaning, but I can't spare her," and she sighed as realising that her patriotism had failed her. "Still, the torpedoes really did him credit, and I told him so, and he said he hoped that they would do him still greater credit."

And having found another bond of sympathy in silver polish, Maria told her Commander how her parlour-maid smothered everything in plate-powder, and if you as much as looked at her she'd give notice. And he twinkled his navy-blue eyes and acknowledged how much easier his housekeeping was than hers, for his plate-cleaners couldn't give notice.

And just as they were having a heart-to-heart talk about house-flannel and things like that, Dick interrupted and reminded her in his own inconsiderate person that

she was a grandmother, and so brought her down to earth again.

"Do show Mater your bedroom and bathroom and the kitchen," he said in his horrid, humorous way, "for she wants to write a book on housekeeping in a submarine."

"So imagine how dreadfully I felt for him when that poor darling let down a kind of serving shelf over my torpedo and said that was where he slept, and when he turned out, his second officer turned in. And I hardly dared ask where his crew slept, but I did, and he said, 'On the floor.'

"I was really shocked to hear Government didn't give 'em beds, for when I thought of the fourteen—there are fourteen—sleeping in a line between the torpedoes, and the top man squeezed in between the two in front, where the point is," Maria explained in a breezy, nautical way, "I felt sure they couldn't be comfortable. But he said they

liked it, though he had them sleep in relays, because they snored so they disturbed the fish. Considerate of him, wasn't it ?

"And he was so delicate about not having a bathroom. The sea-architect wouldn't put one in, for he said they didn't need it as they were mostly under water, and anyhow the North Sea is quite roomy enough to wash in. Which is true," Maria admitted.

"And just as I was wondering if he really had a kitchen, he offered to show it to me, and as I was looking about for a door he lifted the lid of a tin-box on the other side of my torpedo, not a bit larger than my picture-hat box of years ago.

"That, he said, was their kitchen, and very good the cooking tasted when they were two hundred feet down, for if they went farther down they wouldn't require cooking or anything else.

"He said he had a great advantage over other housekeepers, for his cook couldn't ever give notice, and sometimes the only way he could get rid of him was to chuck him overboard," and Maria quoted verbally.

"But it does simplify housekeeping," she admitted.

"And he said if I once kept house in a submarine I'd never live anywhere else. No baths or beds or front-doors and kitchens, and all that kind of nonsense. I'm sure he's right"; and I saw that Maria was completely converted to the new order of things.

"I can't help feeling how much more life will be worth living if there are no beds to make, and things like that, and how much more we'll love to have our friends visit, if one can invite them to sleep on the floor."

I realised the splendid vista of a new

hospitality opened before us, and agreed with Maria that this, rather than anything else, was the splendid work being accomplished by our submarines.

Maria declared they were bringing us back to the simple life, and instanced as a happy result the blow to Mrs. Dill-Binkie, who never came even for week-ends without bringing her own linen, sheets and blankets. —"Isn't it rude of her ?" Maria interposed loftily, "and won't she be mad when she arrives and finds no bed to put 'em on ?

"And when there are no basements or beds or kitchens, and no front-doors, why, let 'em give notice—who cares ?" and the light of a great hope illuminated Maria's features as she searched in her purse for tuppence and laid them on the table as an offering.

"And now you owe me a penny, so you can pay my 'bus fare home. Yes, I'm

going to have a summer submarine ; they'll be cheap after the war ; and I'll take Tompkins along. It's just what she loves : no waiting at table or front-door—only scrubbing. Ideal for her, isn't it ? " Maria said rather solemnly.

As she led the way to the lift I examined her back ; for, as I've mentioned somewhere else, she's awfully particular how she looks behind.

" Oh, I say, Maria, what did you wear submarining ? " for I meant to break it to her gently.

" Why this, of course. You don't suppose I went in a bathing-dress ? "

" There, don't get cross, dear "—and I must say I was filled with a great human joy—" but I'm sorry to tell you that your torpedo did come off and you're all grease behind."

" Gracious me ! " Maria gasped, and

screwed her head so far round that I was afraid she'd never get it back. And everybody stopped eating to stare, and I did a humane deed and shielded her from the public eye.

"It's Tompkins' doing," and Maria nearly wept, "she's most careless about my things. If I'd been linoleum there wouldn't have been a spot on me!"

"Anyhow, Maria," I said, as we stepped into the lift and she quite writhed in the consciousness that she was all wrong behind, "if you're going in for the simple life in a summer submarine, be sure and take enough benzine along; and whatever you do, don't sit on your torpedoes!"

She was so annoyed.

However, I must admit that Maria has thrown a new and encouraging light on the mission of submarines. According to her the simplicity of their housekeeping is

bound to become the fashion in these days of enforced economy. While the impetus given to a simplified hospitality, and the periscope improvement, warranted to take away the terror connected with the callers one doesn't want to see, are among the few blessings we shall owe to the Great War.

. . . . .

So no wonder that Dick now calls Maria the First Lord of the Admiralty.

But only in private.

VI

MARIA ON THE NEW EQUALITY

VI. MARIA ON THE NEW EQUALITY

1916

I FOUND Maria in her dining-room doing war-work—that is, she was dusting the mantelpiece—and terribly depressed.

"What's the matter?" I asked, as she paused tragically, duster uplifted.

"I'm dead tired of the new equality!" and she looked gloomily at a cabinet photograph on the mantelpiece, and gave it such a swish with her duster that it volplaned down to my feet. I picked it up and asked, "Who is it?"

Whereupon Maria repeated that she was tired to death of the new equality, and that it was Parker,

I was staggered. Was it really Parker,

and not the creation of Maria's disordered brain giving way, as I knew, under the strain of deciding whether to use margarine or not?

It was Parker, but in a Court train so artfully curled about her feet as to hide how big they were, while her big hands were discreetly hidden by a sheaf of arum lilies—in fact, she was arrayed in all the glory, with which the rich who can pay and the poor who can't, approach the bonds of holy matrimony.

Parker's face was as lovely as the beautiful lady of Milo. It had been my privilege to see the tears fall like dew-drops from her starry eyes without, as in the lesser loveliness that rings the front-door bell, reddening that perfect nose as she announced to Maria that she had met with the usual unavoidable accident that happens even in the best-regulated families.

Whereupon she handed over to her the remains of a cut-glass salad bowl, and turned her swimming eyes to the ceiling, just like a Madonna of Murillo, while Maria in the meantime glared at the remains like a basilisk, though I don't know exactly what a basilisk is.

"My goodness, Maria, what has happened to Parker?" and I turned the photograph over to see if the riddle was solved behind.

"Parker"—and one could have cut Maria's gloom with a knife—"has just married a peer, and she sent me that done up in the *Morning Post*"—and she spoke as if it were an added insult—"for I recognised her horrid handwriting. It was a war-wedding." And a war-wedding, according to Maria, accounts for the peerage's somewhat eccentric choice of peeresses.

I looked around Maria's dining-room

where the statuesque Parker, with the face of a goddess and the tread of an elephant, had waited so badly and carved such chunks, and recognised as never before the levelling influence of the new equality.

Maria declared, as she stared gloomily at her ex-parlourmaid, that her consuming terror was lest they should be presented at the same Court after the war.

"What should I do if we were to meet?" she wailed. "So awkward! For after she left I found the pieces of five of my best hock glasses in a paper bag in the pantry; so even if I saw her curtsy before the King in a Court train I should always think of those five hock glasses; so I couldn't really bow to her, could I?"

"My dear Maria"—and I studied the brand-new peeress—"you needn't worry about bowing to her, for she'll be sure to cut you dead, for now she's noble she'll be

awfully down on the middle-class, and, after all, Maria, you're only middle-class yourself.

"She certainly was a dreadful waitress, and when she carved a chicken it looked as if it had been struck by a cyclone; but I remember that even Samuel didn't seem to mind that when he looked into her eyes. And you recollect the young man who called on you and asked where you got the Venus of Milo from who answered your door-bell?

"You didn't know what he meant, but I looked at Parker with a new understanding, and realised that she was destined for higher spheres. And she has achieved it, Maria; but she is a luxury in which only the peerage could indulge. In her new life she will not—mercifully—be required to carve any more, and she'll get all the comforts of home in the latest thing in restaurants."

"Anyhow"—and Maria slammed the portrait of Parker the peeress back again on the mantelpiece—"she isn't going to call on me! That's the kind of equality I won't stand. But I'll keep her on the mantelpiece."

And so she does—a subtle revenge. And ever since then the peeress has brooded over Maria's dining-room, where, in her humble capacity, she carved so cruelly, and hit up against the chairs as she passed, so that it was difficult to cover the shock with a company smile.

Now, when visitors study the works of art on the mantelpiece—and Maria has long since left the era of plush and the New Art behind—they always pause before Parker, and, deceived by the Court train, ask respectfully who she is, and Maria always answers at great length. So the ghosts of five of the best hock glasses in the

world, as well as a cut-glass salad bowl, may be said to be avenged at last.

Still, as I said to Maria, a coronet is sure to arrive sooner or later, and Parker is well on the way, for she has endowed an ambulance, and has already been mentioned in what is left of the fashionable intelligence.

"I'm just sick of the new equality!"—and Maria was tearfully annoyed. "I decline to be considered an equal by the people who are climbing up or the people who are climbing down. Parker shan't call—there!" (as if she'd even dream of calling!) "and I won't accept Mrs. Fauntleroy-Jones's invitation to come to after-dinner coffee at ten any time I choose, when she only invites people because she's afraid of Zeppelins!"

By which I realised the cast-iron nature of Maria's new principles. For Mrs. Faunt-

leroy-Jones lives in Park Lane, surrounded by columns and orchids in spite of the war, and it had once been Maria's best torpedo-steel determination to penetrate into Mrs. Fauntleroy-Jones's intimacy. That was before the war ; but she had got no farther than her Thursday crushes with buns.

So I was considerably surprised when Maria passed over an elderly scrawl in which Mrs. Fauntleroy-Jones quite implored her to come any evening—indeed every evening—to after-dinner coffee at 10 p.m. I realised the vanity of granted wishes, when Maria remarked briefly, "The impertinence ! "

For, it seems, because Mrs. Fauntleroy-Jones is in mortal terror of Zeppelins she has instituted her 10 p.m. "At-homes," so she shan't be left alone to tremble. Now, at 10 o'clock she surrounds herself with all

available bosom friends for conversation, and a female British variety of the Blue Hungarians for noise, so that she can at least tremble in company.

As Maria remarked with indescribable bitterness, now that we are all equal before Zeppelins, she declined the inexpensive intimacy of Mrs. Fauntleroy-Jones's cold after-dinner coffee at 10 p.m.—an intimacy which she once longed for, she admitted, but which she did not want to owe to Zeppelins.

Anyhow, Mrs. Fauntleroy-Jones in this time of stress might just as well leave off the Fauntleroy and face whatever Fate had in store for her as plain Jones.

Indeed, Maria grew quite eloquent about the levelling tendency of the Zeppelin. It had even taken away all her nervousness in the presence of titles ; so much so that for the first time she felt she could curtsy

before her Sovereign with that absolute calmness in her knees which is the recognition of our common humanity.

She even went so far as to say she wouldn't answer Mrs. Fauntleroy-Jones's invitation, which had now ceased to be an honour. As if she had any intention of going anywhere at 10 p.m. with the off-chance of meeting a Zeppelin! For she and the Zeppelins invariably chose the same weather to go out in—that is to say, good weather.

So in good weather she now always stays at home; while in bad weather she wouldn't go out anyhow, now that she owed it to the new economy to mingle with society in a 'bus. So she was deaf to the hyphenated, which, after all, is the lowest title going, and usually self-inflicted.

In fact, she now felt—what she had always rather suspected—that she was a

true Republican at heart — titles were nothing to her, nor was Park Lane.

However, she did reply to Mrs. Fauntleroy-Jones, but on a post-card, which more than anything proved the Republican sternness of her principles. For, as she explained, the time had gone by when she could be patronised by a hyphen now that the real nobility are to be found in 'buses, just like ordinary people, and sometimes even recognise one.

According to Maria, the aristocracy has at last learnt the stern lesson that even a title cannot save them from a Zeppelin, and she tilted her chin and lifted her nose in a way that made me feel she was worthy of being the mother of something or other Roman, her principles were such.

And she poked the fire in weighty silence, as if her thoughts were too exalted for

words. And yet you never can tell! Even principles sometimes have a gutta-percha backbone. Maria's had.

She brought the wreck of her principles to call a week after. She wore a dress that was so short that she showed a length of light, cloth-topped Russian boots with a tassel, which, with all respect for our heroic Ally, I do hope will be worn out before Diana's twins reach that higher state of mental development which will enable them to criticise their grandma. She also had on a Russian cap at an ungrandmotherly angle, and she spoke as one revolving in the highest circles.

"You'll never guess"—and she positively swelled with importance—"what Samuel found waiting for him in the hall when he got to his office last Friday!"

I said I was sure I couldn't, for there were so many things Samuel was liable to find

in the hall, including umbrellas, galoches, and tax summonses.

Maria froze me with a cold, grey eye.

"I meant to say 'who.' You might have understood, only you wouldn't!"

I intimated in a resigned way that I gave it up.

"He found"—and Maria looked up as if she expected me to collapse on the spot—"he found a Marquis waiting for him in the hall."

I was so stunned that I could only murmur, "With the umbrellas or among the galoches?" but felt it was inadequate.

Maria overlooked my *lèse-majesté*, so to speak, and said, not without pathos, "To think of the old nobility waiting for Samuel on the door-mat. That is what I call the real, true equality. Touching, ain't it?"

"What did he want?" I asked feebly.

"He came to say he'd like to be a director. For when the nobility aren't fighting they are hard up. And he was hard up and too old to fight."

"Hah!" I murmured thoughtfully, which quite provoked Maria.

"Anyhow, as soon as Samuel told me I got his address and invited him to dinner at once. And he's coming! Answered by return. Gratifying, isn't it? I do hope Samuel'll take him on."

"Then I suppose you'll ask Parker also now that everybody's equal," I ventured meekly.

"I ask Parker?"—and I simply can't describe Maria's hauteur. "Oh yes, I dare say she'd like to come fast enough! Never! That isn't equality; that's impudence." And I realised the awful social gulf that separates Parker the peeress from Maria—at least at present.

But Maria yearned for sympathy, and went into details.

"I did think of getting a new dinner-card engraved, but there wasn't time, for I was so afraid somebody else'd snap him up. Yes, just a war-dinner, without entrées or ices, and barley-water instead of champagne. So economical. But of course one can do that sort of thing if one's got a Marquis coming.

"I've invited all sorts of people to meet him. Of course Mrs. Dill-Binkie, because I know it'll make her hopping mad, for she's never had a Marquis to dinner yet!" And Maria paused on a note of triumph, rose, shook out her war-skirts, and offered me a patronising pump-handle.

"I'm afraid I shan't see you before my dinner, but I'll come in after and tell you all about it," and she paused at a mirror to give a more pronounced tilt to her cap

after the manner of the darlings of the Royal Flying Corps.

"And now I feel more'n ever," Maria said with emotion, "that there's nothing so beautiful and satisfying as the new equality, especially"—and she spoke with magnificent self-confidence, the natural result of having captured a Marquis—"especially when it's with the right kind of people."

VII

CARDBOARD FRIENDSHIP

VII

CARDBOARD FRIENDSHIP

1916

MARIA was ill with a bad cold. She had been patriotically patrolling Victoria Street selling flags in white voile and a drizzle, so what else could she expect ?

For Maria has not yet reached that apex of the socially elect who are given the prize beats in the Stock Exchange and other soft-hearted things, where they swoop down on philanthropic and long-suffering bandits and empty their cheque-books. At best Maria only gathered in sixpences, and when the drizzle crescendoed into rain Maria and her flag tray took shelter in a doorway and her voile clung and her spirits drooped.

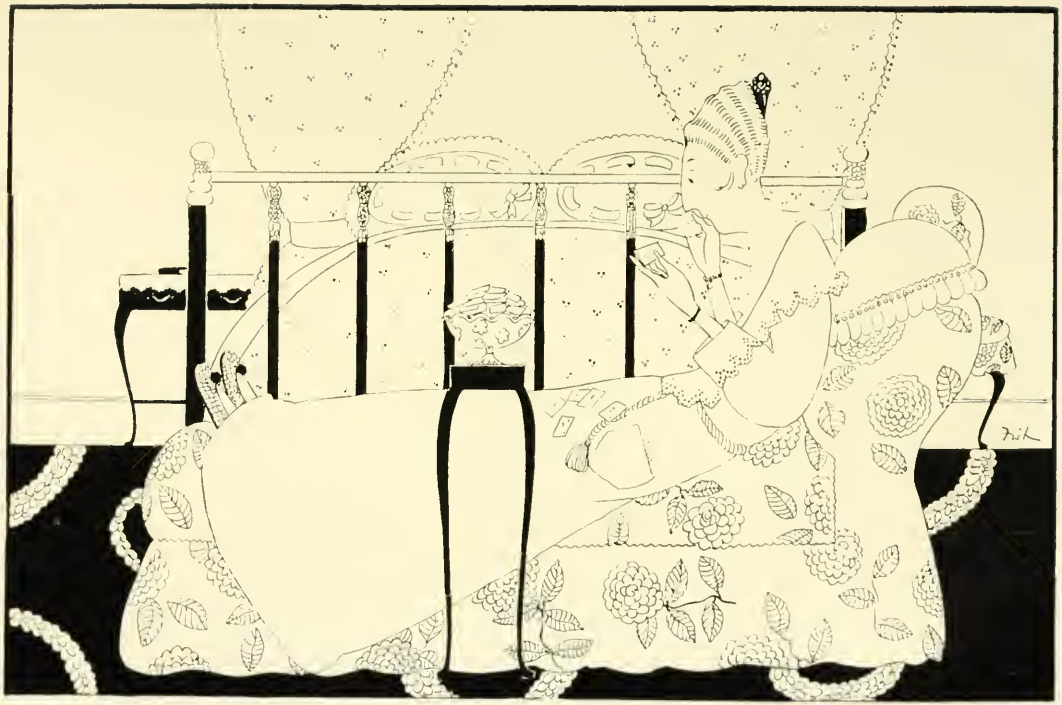
Maria admitted, as I sat down out of reach of her microbes, that it would have

been cheaper if she had at once contributed the doctor's fee and the voile to the good cause, and stayed at home. Only you never can tell.

Here she coughed a hollow cough, and I saw at once that she not only had a bad cold but, what is worse, an unbecoming cold, and that the pink of her dressing-gown was out of harmony with the red of her nose.

Maria lay on her bedroom couch, and as I entered she was studying a year's accumulation of visiting cards in the card-receiver which usually stands on a yellow marble slab in the hall under Samuel's second best portrait in oils. They were more than two years old, for nobody has of course called since, but even the clash of arms has been unable to dislodge them out of the card-receiver.

"What," Maria murmured plaintively



CARDBOARD FRIENDSHIPS

as she picked them up one by one, "what would life be without friends?"

I said baldly that I didn't know. "You haven't been near me for a week," she complained in a voice of concentrated suffering, "and of course no one else has been, and I've nearly coughed my head off. Two years ago everybody'd have left cards. Why, I remember the time when I wasn't near so bad, and yet as many as ten footmen came to inquire. Yes, in those days one knew who one's real friends were," and she sniffed into her handkerchief as one cut to the soul.

"Of course it's different nowadays," she admitted with her usual sense of justice, "for you've got to be wounded to be in it. But I really got so lonely I couldn't bear it, and so I sent for the card-receiver to keep me company, and I've been counting how many friends I've got in my address book.

Guess!" Here her face became convulsed, and she sneezed three times.

"Over a thousand," she announced with modest triumph, as she recovered, "and I can truly say I couldn't have half so many if it weren't for visiting cards."

Now I know Maria puts all her charwomen, "temporaries," "jobs" and tradespeople in her address book, so I felt she was unconsciously exaggerating the number of her dear friends. Indeed, the queer mixture at her last pre-war "At Home" was probably due to Samuel's having had her invitations addressed at the office from her address book.

This may also account for society's having got so singularly mixed—at least at the period when there was any society.

"I really can't imagine what friendship would be without visiting cards," Maria repeated, quite overcome by this stupen-

dous thought, as she looked fondly through the cardboard expressions of abiding attachment, and added that she had never yet got a housemaid who would dust them properly. And if she did she was always sure to get them mixed.

I know Maria's subtle procedure. Undying bonds of friendship though they all were, I observed there were certain favourite ones she laid aside, and, after an exhaustive examination of the friends that lay at the bottom, she always placed the top ones on top.

But even the newest top ones were more than two years old, yellow with age and grimy with the playful London dirt; but they were certainly the most important. They may be described as the fairest blossoms of Maria's progress, unhappily nipped in the bud by the European conflict.

For in the course of her flight upwards

Maria had garnered the visiting cards of an Eastern Ambassador, an American Count of Papal manufacture, a Bulgarian diplomatist, besides a sprinkling of the minor British nobility, and these, no matter how the housemaid dusted them with a duster incapable of social distinction, always found themselves on top.

And always seeing them on top her friends may have supposed that the Eastern Ambassador, the American Count, the Bulgarian diplomatist as well as the sprinkling spent all their available time leaving cards on Maria. But the truth is they had only called once in pre-war times. Indeed the Eastern Ambassador's footman was wholly to blame for his Excellency's visit, for being deeply engrossed in private affairs of his own he had left the diplomatic cards at the wrong house.

Maria never could and never did account for the ambassadorial visit; still it remained an uplifting triumph for her, and his Excellency enabled her—possibly his greatest diplomatic feat—to crush a parlourmaid who aspired to parlourmaid in diplomatic circles, and who was deceived by his Excellency's card into believing that she could enter diplomacy through Maria, and so she was quite affable, at least until she gave notice.

"It is curious," Maria said thoughtfully, "the cards left by people one doesn't know and never heard of. I suppose they leave 'em by mistake. I once left Mrs. Dill-Binkie's on people she perfectly loathes because it happened to be in my card-case. However, they called on her and left cards, and then she called on them and left cards, and if it hadn't been for the war I'm sure they'd be still leaving cards. But it does

show what a blessing to friendship cards are," she added with feeling.

"And you've no idea what a comfort it is to lie here and read their dear names. For besides the people I never knew there are some I haven't seen for ages, and shouldn't know if we met. But they always leave cards. Touching, isn't it?

"I used to get two thousand printed for me and four thousand for Samuel, and so I got 'em a penny a packet cheaper. One's got to think of that when one's got so many friends and things are so dear. But they're gone in no time, the cards I mean.

"And what a mercy they are!" Maria announced solemnly. "Only think how dreadful it would be to have to see one's whole visiting list! It'd drive me wild. When I used to come home and find cards

had been left I was so thankful I'd been spared talking to them.

"For if we had to talk to a thousand friends besides the people who ar'n't friends one would die of exhaustion. I find the language of cards quite satisfying enough; each corner turned down has its own sweet message," she remarked poetically, "even if one sometimes forgets just what it is.

"Of course it is awkward when people turn down the wrong corner. When dear Mrs. Dill-Binkie was so ill Mrs. Simpson-Blotter left cards on Mr. Dill-Binkie to enquire and by mistake turned down the corner to congratulate, and that's the reason Mrs. Dill-Binkie hasn't invited her since.

"But now that everybody is so friendly and even the 'buses are full of people with titles, I expect we'll be leaving cards more than ever after the war."

Indeed, according to Maria, what with visiting cards, motor-buses and the telephone the impetus given to friendship in our time is simply immense. She confessed that just before the war she sometimes felt she had more friends than she quite knew what to do with, and that was the reason she hated to know people who live next door, for one is really never safe from friends who live next door.

She further added that it is nearly as trying to have friends who can reach one without the aid of a 'bus and who only come to talk. Still that kind of friendship, she was thankful to say, was already on the decline before the war.

"Just think that there was a time when neighbours were friends and came in at any time! Primitive, wasn't it!" Maria remarked with forbearance. "Wouldn't it

be too dreadful to have friends drop in without hats !

" Mrs. Dill-Binkie once had an awful experience. She told me an old friend took a house opposite hers quite by accident ; for if she'd known, she said, she'd have put a stop to it at once, somehow.

" But she didn't know till the friend moved in with new blinds, a vacuum-cleaner and a dog, and so happy to be living opposite her dear old friend Rosemary Dill-Binkie. And do you know the very first thing she did ? "

I prepared myself for the worst.

" Brought over a dish of junket with her own hands and without a hat the first night after dinner because she understood Mr. Dill-Binkie loved junket. Mrs. Dill-Binkie said she could have sunk on the floor with mortification when the butler announced the friend with the junket, and who had

insisted on being shown right into the dining-room.

"She said the look in the butler's face was perfectly awful; nearly a notice. He didn't know what to make of a friend without a hat who brought in food and refused to be shown into the drawing-room. He was awfully upset. The footman hid his feelings in the dinner lift.

"She told me she couldn't sleep all night long, wondering if cook would give her notice. As if she couldn't make a junket! A cook so superior that she had the kitchenmaid do all the cooking.

"Mrs. Dill-Binkie said it made her feel as if she lived in the slums and the district visitor had come to call. So she implored her friend never to do it again. And she never did, and since then she only leaves cards. Such a comfort.

"For servants are so sensitive, and you

always have to consider their feelings. And if you considered your family's half as much you'd die of nervous prostration before you knew it. But that's one of the comforts you do get out of home. You don't have to. Or what would be the use of home?

"Besides," Maria continued quite uplifted, "just think how sweetly friends would get on if they only saw each other's cards. It's talking that makes them quarrel.

"And isn't it annoying to have the wrong people call and insist on seeing one? The right people never do. One's sure not to want to go down, and if it's cold there's no fire, and when tea comes up it isn't wanted. And if they've a taxi waiting they're dreadfully disappointed to find one in, and it's only when they get up to go that they begin to look happy. Now if they'd

only left cards we'd all have been spared so much.

"And what a blessing it is that one's only expected to leave cards after dining out! Supposing it had been a horrid dinner what could one say on being shown up? One would have to tell such dreadful lies, and it's no use wasting lies if one has principles. So in a way cards do save one from sin, don't they?

"Why, it was only the very last month before the war that we dined with the Simpson-Blotters. You know they always have a job butler"—as if Maria never had—Oh, Maria! "And just as he reached Samuel he tripped and poured a perfect stream of caramel sauce over Samuel's new dress-coat, so he nearly had to tear himself out of his chair he stuck so. And the way Mrs. Simpson-Blotter sat smiling as if nothing had happened made me feel

that I never wanted to go to one of her nasty dinners again.

"I was mor'n thankful I only had to leave cards, for what could I have said? Of course he'd been drinking. He breathed it into my ear when he passed things.

"But young men one invites to dinner always ought to leave cards. You remember Tommy Tozier? Before the war he told me he and his friends had to dine out and dance so much that they were obliged to hire a messenger boy just to leave cards.

"I told him that wasn't the same thing at all, and begged him never to get out of the way of leaving his own cards or he'd lose all his friends, and there's nothing so elevating and useful as friendship. Of course whenever he married, as I said to him, he'd have a dear one whose sweet duty it would be, though I don't really

know why, to leave his cards with her own for ever.

"I thought that'd make him want to marry," Maria explained, "but all he said was he'd rather have a messenger boy for he could get rid of him at once, and it was ever so much more expensive to get rid of a wife. You remember Tommy, don't you?"

Remember Tommy Tozier of the Guards whose feet in pre-war days were so much more important than his head! Rather. Indeed, as I told Maria, I had met that young warrior in Kensington Gardens only the very day before hobbling along by aid of a crutch and the shoulder of the prettiest young Nemesis in the world, who tenderly carried the other crutch.

They were so engrossed in the kind of talk familiar to young things in Kensington Gardens that Tommy looked up with a

blush and an embarrassed grin as he recognised me.

He introduced me to Nemesis and remarked genially, as an introduction to his crutches, that he had been "strafed" but was now getting along famously. The only word he seemed to have annexed in foreign parts was "straf," but he quite revelled in that.

I was glad the young hero had found his Nemesis, and so was Maria, between two sneezes, for, after all, she has a heart somewhere behind her whalebones.

"Still," Maria insisted, "I don't see why a wife should be obliged to carry around her husband's visiting cards." And she intimated that this is one of women's trials which has been unaccountably overlooked. Nor why as soon as the happy pair leave the altar he should give up all personal friendships, and she should give up her music.

"The Voice that breathed o'er Eden," according to Maria, being usually the last tune of a strictly domestic nature they are ever again destined to hear.

I rose to go just as she carefully readjusted the cards of the Eastern Ambassador, the American Count of Papal manufacture, the Bulgarian diplomatist and the sprinkling of the lower British nobility, to their usual dusty eminence on top. And she gazed at these with a certain sad emotion suitable to the times.

"What *would* friendship be without visiting cards!" she repeated with deep feeling.

But, indeed, that is a riddle which would stagger the Sphinx. There may be an answer after the war.

VIII

WAR HENS

VIII. WAR HENS

1916

I FOUND Maria full of patriotic ardour and surrounded by poultry pamphlets at a penny apiece. She didn't look up as I came in, but remarked loftily, as one revolving in higher spheres, "I'm going in for a hennery."

"A what?" I asked, unenlightened.

"I'm going in for eggs," she interpreted, and paused in an abstruse study of a penny pamphlet.

"You too, Maria?" I asked, resigned.

"Of course I too," she retorted, nettled. "Why not? Everybody's doing it!"

As if I wasn't aware of it.

"Even Mrs. Dill-Binkie," said Maria. "She's started in her back drawing-room.

Turned it into the sweetest farmyard you ever did, all surrounded by wire-netting, and room for two hen-houses—six in each —Plymouth Rocks and Pilgrim Mothers. And she's had just the smartest kind of Marie Antoinette shepherdess dress and a sun-bonnet made by 'Lucile' to wear when she feeds them. She's got the loveliest taste.

"There's a wire-netting between them and the front drawing-room, so when people come to tea they can look at the hens and not interfere with their laying. And isn't it lucky hens don't crow? Of course they cackle, but one doesn't mind that, for it's only to show they're doing their bit and trying their best to stop us importing ten million pounds' worth of foreign eggs every year!" Maria intoned impressively, referring to an inspired pamphlet.

"THEY WON'T LAY!"

"But isn't it just like England—no real energy? Won't even take the trouble to lay her own eggs. And those poor dears perfectly willing to do it, and all they want is scraps. Give 'em scraps, and they'll do the rest. Touching, ain't it? And not a family in England without scraps, though the way one finds what the kitchen calls scraps in the dust-bin is too awful for words.

"But would you believe a simple thing like a hen could be so patriotic?" Maria exclaimed, quite moved. "I never considered a hen particularly interesting as a character, but now I know more about 'em it just makes me ache to see how confiding they are.

"A hen'll sit on a china egg for ever and put her whole mind to hatching a chicken out of it. And I've just read how one sat on thirteen potatoes for weeks

waiting for something to turn up—only it didn't; but the pamphlet says it's to encourage her maternal instincts. Though," Maria said not without reason, "I don't see the use of encouraging her maternal instincts towards thirteen potatoes, do you?

"I call 'em patriotic, I do. Only give 'em scraps and a bit of a house out of a packing-case and a cabbage just out of reach for 'em to try and peck at, and they'll do most anything for their country. The old-fashioned hens, always gadding about and wanting fresh air and laying their eggs goodness knows where, are quite out of it.

"It's the war hens who are working for their country, and I'm going in for 'em. I shall have three, to keep each other company, for I've been told four-legged things get just as much bored as we do if they're not entertained."

"But hens only have two legs, Maria," I remonstrated mildly, "and what a mercy it is!—for whatever should we do with four drumsticks!" But Maria was oblivious, engrossed in a contemplation of the future.

"I'm going to give 'em Samuel's study" —Samuel's study is where he keeps his boots and his whisky—"and my tin foot-bath, and have the whole thing covered in with wire-netting. And I shall give 'em a cabbage apiece so's each can have her own to peck at, and three ready-made nests of cotton-wool so they shan't have to bother about anything; they'll have quite enough to do to lay eggs.

"The first morning they came, Mrs. Dill-Binkie said, each of hers laid an egg, so she reckoned, leaving out Sundays—you can't expect 'em to lay on Sundays, can you?—they'd certainly lay thirty-five

hundred eggs a year—more if some of 'em are twins.

"Of course they do give trouble, but everything does. Her butler, though he's all of seventy-five, gave notice at once; he said he hadn't been engaged for butlering hens. Wasn't it unpatriotic?

"But she had to give in, for you can't get even an old butler now for love or money, so she's had to engage a Boy Scout to take care of 'em, and he wouldn't come till she told him it was war work; and what she has to pay him is too dreadful.

"But of course I know more'n she," Maria announced loftily, "everybody in the house has got to help. Cook's seeing to the scraps, and Samuel's promised to sit with 'em sometimes, though he doesn't know yet where I mean to put 'em," she said thoughtfully, "and Diana is to bring

the twins to help, for it'll be nice for them to learn to be kind to poor, dumb things.

"And I can do the rest," she went on with increasing enthusiasm. "There won't be much to do, anyhow; they can't run away and they've got their scraps and their foot-bath and their cabbages, and they'll be company for each other.

"Every day they'll have a new egg to take up their attention, and I call that a beautiful arrangement of Nature," Maria remarked with feeling, "and only wish we could be as easily entertained."

As I rose to go she said, with the stateliness of a Roman matron, "If I can't persuade you to go in for eggs, I hope at least you'll buy yours from me. I'll let you have a dozen next week at two shillings. Same as the dairy—but just think what eggs you'll get from *my* hens!"

"Oh, I see, you've already started

yours," and Maria's enthusiasm was as catching as the measles.

"Well no, not exactly, that is, I mean to say, I haven't got my hens yet, but"—and she spoke with great dignity as if this was the chief thing that mattered—"but I've quite made up my mind."

. . . . .

I gave Maria's hens a week's start, and then I called for my eggs.

Samuel's study is at the end of a long, blind passage opposite the front door. It is Samuel's sanctum into which he disappears with bosom friends, and when they reappear they always smack their lips and look as if they again found life worth living.

But when I opened the door it was on a new régime. The old one had been overthrown by national necessity, and the

small interior was now occupied by a kind of immense cage of wire-netting, from the top of which dangled three cabbages.

On the floor at one side stood Maria's foot-bath obviously not used for foot-baths —not at all—and opposite, rather high up and side by side, were fastened three woolly nests very convenient for a chat if the matrons were conversationally inclined.

As for the patriotic inmates, I was amazed to discover all three wedged into one corner, alert, suspicious, quivering, and trying evidently to back away as far as possible from Maria, who, as I followed the blink of their beady eyes, I found sitting flat on the floor in an attitude becoming only to youth. Perfectly oblivious, buried fathoms deep in hen literature, every time she turned a page they gave a nervous start.

"What are you doing, Maria?" I

exclaimed. Whereupon Maria emerged out of her latest pamphlet and said hopelessly, "They won't lay."

Maria's feet were in a pair of old felt slippers in which she only appears before Samuel, and they were outstretched at full length; her back hair was in a bun. She was a monument of despair.

"I've had 'em five days and not an egg yet," she wailed. "I've been reading everything about 'em since they came, and I'm all mixed up. I've sat up with 'em all last night in case they wanted anything, and Samuel's furious because I've taken his room; but he has no sense of patriotism, though I told him it was war work. And just see 'em look at me, and I thought they'd be quite tame by now and such good company!"

And, indeed, the three hens gazed at Maria with a malign stare as if she were no

better than a foreign hen herself, and between them lay the impassable gulf of commercial hostility.

"And to think what I've done for 'em," and Maria was visibly depressed. "I chose a lino with a daisy pattern so they shouldn't get homesick for fields and things, and I've sprinkled 'em every morning with 'New Mown Hay' to make the air seem more natural.

"And I've given 'em Epsom salts every night and had their nests fastened up just as in *Peter Pan*—great idea for families in flats, ain't it?" she added in parenthesis; "a wonderful man, Barrie, don't you think? As for scraps," and she sighed heavily, "you've no idea how my bills have gone up since they came! The number of joints cook orders for 'em besides vegetables and things is really too dreadful!"

And while Maria mourned I looked at the culprits and was struck by the unearthly intelligence of their expression. The middle one positively winked at me.

Maria roused herself and resolutely tried to look at the brighter side of her hen problems.

"Of course they're the very best. I got 'em from Mrs. Dill-Binkie. She let me have them to oblige; but how she did charge! I shouldn't mind much if they'd only lay," and she gazed at them gloomily. As if impelled by a common purpose, the three separated.

"They're all Pilgrim Mothers, and just over from America. Nice feathers, ain't they? Mrs. Dill-Binkie got 'em to match her wall-paper. I do just love her tail, don't you?"

Maria looked dreamily at the middle matron, who, as she pecked languidly at

something or other, caught my attention by the unsteadiness of her legs, a fatuous blink of her eye, and a kind of side lurch as if she were trying to dance the Tango but couldn't. I also observed a look of conscious virtue in the other two, characteristic of the sinful who aren't found out.

"Maria," I said cautiously, and I tried to break it to her gently, "there is something the matter with that hen."

"Oh!" Maria gasped, "don't say so! It'll be seven-and-six gone!"

"It isn't as bad as that," I calmed her, "it's only a matter of—of character. The fact is your Pilgrim Mother is—is, well—exhilarated—to be as honest with you, Maria, as I always wish you to be with me—your Pilgrim Mother, I am sorry to say, is drunk."

I shall never forget how Maria first

stared at me and then at the Pilgrim Mother.

"Drunk!" was all she uttered, and then looked a tragedy in five acts at the feathered reprobate, who was now vainly trying to stand on one leg.

"What," I asked Maria in the manner of a judicial inquiry, "what has that hen had to drink?"

"Drink?" and Maria turned haughtily on me, "of course only water." But struck by a sudden suspicion she got closer to the wire-netting, pressed her long, thin nose against it, gave a comprehensive sniff, and sank back in horror.

"Maria," I remonstrated, "control yourself. What is it?"

"Brandy!" Maria wailed. Then her glance, usually of the eagle variety, fell on the scrap at which the Pilgrim Mother had pecked. She seemed to recognise it.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, and her hands sank helplessly on her lap. "My goodness, if cook hasn't been and sent 'em up some of the old mincemeat in which she put too much brandy even for Samuel!"

We both looked at the unfortunate victim to scraps, and then I saw Maria's eye kindle with renewed hope. "But that's the reason they wouldn't lay! I was getting dreadfully worried! And now I'm so glad I know!"

But the fact is Maria didn't know, at least she didn't know till a week after, and then she came in at tea-time and sank exhausted on the Empire couch, for which she's got the absolutely wrong back—stiff.

"And how are the hens, and how many eggs have they laid?" I asked politely.

"Hens!" Maria exclaimed with a baleful intensity. "I'm sure she knew!"

"Who knew what?" I asked as I offered her tea.

"Mrs. Dill-Binkie. Nobody can ever make me believe she didn't. As they simply wouldn't lay, I was so upset that I made up my mind to send for the chicken doctor of the Zoo and find out what the matter was. And so I did, and he came, and do you know what he came in?" and Maria paused as if it were a conundrum.

"An aeroplane," I answered promptly —I couldn't think of anything else.

She nearly annihilated me with a stare that contained the concentrated suffering of two weeks. So I forgave her.

"In a motor. His own. Think of it! A chicken doctor! And do you know what he did?"

Maria took such a long, indignant breath that I prepared myself for the worst.

"He charged me a guinea!"

I couldn't say a word, but I felt for her.

"And that after what he told me about them, and I nearly wild wondering if Mrs. Dill-Binkie knew, though I'm positive she did. He said they weren't Pilgrim Mothers at all," and Maria spoke in a voice I can only describe as hollow, "but it's too dreadful for words, and I shan't ever forgive Mrs. Dill-Binkie," and Maria raised her eyes to the stucco ornament in the ceiling as if registering a solemn vow. "In fact he said they—they were—Pilgrim Fathers!"

IX

MARGARINE AND SOCIETY

IX

MARGARINE AND SOCIETY

1916

I MET Maria in that great department store where everybody goes only they pretend they don't. Maria pretends she don't but she does. It is the unwritten rule that when you enter there you leave style behind, or you're overcharged. I saw at a glance that Maria had on a pre-war hat, and her skirt was so tight that it had 1912 written all over it, and she carried a string bag. She was, so to speak, in mufti.

We ran against each other at the poultry where Maria was thumping in a business-like way the breast of a fowl on which only the microscopic eye of the ingratiating assistant could distinguish any plumpness.

"'E's true Surrey, mem, I do assure you, for I wouldn't wish for to deceive you. Just look at the breast of 'im—there's lusciousness . . ." and he rose to almost poetic fervour.

"Don't talk to me!" Maria snapped; "he's nothing but an old hen and you know it. And his breast bone's been broken to make him look young and fat. It's years since he laid an egg!" she breathed indignantly.

"We only break their breast bones to make 'em look pleasant and not with a wish to deceive," said the insulted assistant, "and if I may make so bold an' you 'aven't any further use for this 'ere fowl I could wish you'd kindly leave it alone," for Maria was playing on its chest as on a lute.

"Oh!" Maria gasped as the assistant rescued the bird and bore it to the rear,

"did you ever!" Whereupon she turned indignantly and encountered my gaze.

I think for a moment Maria had a mad impulse to deny her identity—to escape the incriminating fact that she was where she was with a string bag, but she was imprisoned in a kind of *cul-de-sac* consisting of a pyramid of cheese, a double flounce of poultry hanging head downwards, and a marble slab on which reposed a gigantic porker with a lemon in his mouth, evidently placed there by a poet in the pork line who had no other poetical outlet.

"What are you doing here, and don't you look odd, Maria?" I remarked with the frankness of friendship as I examined her up and down, "and to pretend you never shop here!"

Maria swallowed hard and stared so helplessly about that a mistaken cheese assistant on the left in a white apron

appeared between two mild Cheddars—at first I thought there were three, but one turned out to be his face—and remarked "One and three a pound," for he thought Maria was signalling for cheese.

But Maria overlooked the man of cheese and was just about to elbow her way past me when she suddenly fell back against the poultry, clutched her string bag and breathed so hard that I cried :

"What is it, Maria ? Have you lost your purse ? "

And Maria panted, "Don't you see—by the—oh !—in front of the margarine—Mrs. Dill-Binkie ! "

And before I could recover from the shock of seeing Mrs. Dill-Binkie in front of the margarine Maria was off like a shot—past the pig, the poultry and the pastry counters, along the prime cuts, between the vegetables where she collided with a

rampart of young cauliflowers, past the bacon and the hardware, and then, manifestly breathless but triumphant, she hurled herself in front of the margarine and confronted the agonized features of Mrs. Dill-Binkie. And Mrs. Dill-Binkie recoiled before Maria and dropped all her change, while the assistant leaning out of his bower of margarine, his fingers lightly outstretched on the counter, was just saying "Will you take it with you as usual, mem?" when Maria bounded up.

I saw it, for I had reached the cauliflowers in my effort to witness a conflict which I realized was nothing short of historic, and just in time to observe Maria's smile which was one of a kind specially kept on ice for social purposes. And it contained the concentrated indignation of one who had for years been invited only to Mrs. Dill-Binkie's second-rate crushes

without R.S.V.P.—which shows what they are !—and as I saw Maria's encounter with Mrs. Dill-Binkie at the margarine I felt that Maria had scored heavily.

As I squeezed past the cauliflowers in my effort to arrive I unfortunately collided with half a calf's head, a cabbage, half a bushel of potatoes, a bag of onions and an infant sucking a nice, juicy carrot, all packed in a pram out of which they promptly rolled to the loud indignation of the lady who pushed the vehicle and wore her hair in curl pins surmounted by a cap with the visor behind and who refused to accept my apologies.

She picked up the half a calf's head with indignant reproach.

"You've 'urt 'im, you 'ave. You'd a ought to py. It ud serve ye right!" and she dusted the single calf's cheek tenderly.

Whereupon she picked up her screaming

offspring, smacked it briskly in the place so wisely designed for that purpose by nature, and said briefly: "Stop 'owling, or I'll give 'e summat to 'owl for!"

Which diversion I discreetly utilized to disappear in search of Maria; but Maria had vanished. However, I knew she'd come to tell me all about it, and so she did that very afternoon at 4.30, and exhaling the peace which only those feel who've scored. She helped herself to bread and butter and asked pointedly, her little finger uplifted, 'Butter?' And I replied with the dignity of the wrongfully suspected, 'Butter? Why, of course, butter,' though I will not disguise from the honoured reader that it was margarine. So Maria, with the innocent confidence of a bleating lamb, ate three slices of bread and margarine and heaped coals of fire on my unworthy head by remarking as she licked her right

forefinger, "After all, there's nothing like dairy butter, is there?"

I replied there wasn't, and there isn't, except, of course, margarine. So Maria unsuspiciously ate bread and margarine as one uplifted and said she only wished I'd been there to see.

"I said to her 'to think of finding you here and buying margarine! Whatever is it like?'"

I admired Maria's subtlety.

"She turned quite pea-green and there she stood with two pounds of margarine on her arm where she usually carries her Pekinese, and a two-year-old Virot on her head."

Such was Mrs. Dill-Binkie's disguise. "'Oh, my dear, you don't think we eat it upstairs,' she nearly sobbed, and there were tears or something else in her eyes, and it's the first time she's called me

'dear' for years. 'I only bought it for the kitchen for I do think they ought to do their bit downstairs because the poor cows are suffering so from overwork.' And then she said—cat—'I've been wanting to ask you to lunch for ages and will you come next week? I've asked a War Bishop and a War Duchess.'

"So of course I accepted," Maria admitted.

Just what I should expect of Maria—bribed.

"Don't forget that you owe that invitation to margarine, and don't be ungrateful," I admonished her.

"Forget!" Maria said resentfully. "How could I forget! For that very morning I'd gone down to cook and asked if they'd be willing to do their bit for their country and give up something or other. And cook said they would, and guess what it was?"

I shook my head, for people's ideas of self-sacrifice are so odd. Most of them are usually so ready to give up what they don't want.

"Well, it was margarine," and Maria breathed tragically.

I wasn't surprised.

"They'd been eating it for two weeks and never a word—the best sixpenny kind sent from the stores with the bill open for all to see. I wouldn't hide anything for worlds; I'd scorn to," and Maria soared to the very top notch of moral rectitude.

"And I thought they were so happy, and rather hoped I'd get 'em to give up milk and sugar too—so imagine how I felt when the very next thing cook said to me with lovely politeness—she has such good manners," Maria explained by way of parenthesis, "but she charges extra for them in her

wages,—that if I gave 'em any more margarine they'd all give notice.

"And wasn't it ungrateful? Obliging me to pay two and six a pound instead of sixpence. But servants haven't any patriotism about butter, though I told cook how the cows were suffering from being overworked, and cook said she was sorry for the suffering cows and hoped we'd help them by eating margarine upstairs. She wished the kitchen would, but they wouldn't.

"I was so upset I couldn't sleep all night thinking how I could get 'em to feel more patriotic. For really, you know, the difference between two and six a pound and sixpence is too awful for words.

"And then I fell asleep and dreamed, and what do you think I dreamt?" Maria asked with feeling, but mercifully required no answer.

"I dreamt a lovely angel appeared to me and said—it sounded like music—'They won't know the difference.'"

This divine message proved to be less cryptic to Maria than to me, for Maria raised her eyes to the ceiling and murmured ecstatically, "And when I awoke I remembered the message and it brought back real hope, for I rather thought I knew just what he meant. I say 'he,'" she explained conscientiously, "because he had his hair parted on one side, though what he said was really more like what a female angel might be expected to say. So practical. Anyhow I understood, and d'you know the first thing I did?

"I took my latch-key and went straight to the stores and bought two pounds of fivepenny margarine. I couldn't afford the sixpenny kind for I had to get my 'bus fare out of it, and then I went home

and took it up to my bedroom and peeled off the margarine label," Maria announced triumphantly.

"Then I tied it up nicely again—took it down to cook and told her I hoped they'd be satisfied now with dairy butter at two and six which I'd brought home specially for them, and would while the war lasted, for I wanted to do my bit. And now they believe I am paying two and six they're quite satisfied and they *don't* know the difference. Of course," said Maria piously, "I shouldn't have thought of it if it hadn't been for my dream."

Perhaps she would and perhaps she wouldn't, I don't know. I looked thoughtfully at her as she helped herself to the last slice of bread and—butter.

"It shows that class don't know the difference, doesn't it?" she said in her superior way, "they aren't like us," and

then she added politely: "Never tasted nicer butter, and, somehow, I should have thought you were just the kind who'd go in for margarine."

I retorted rather heatedly that I should be obliged for a description of the human being specially created to eat margarine!

To which Maria made no reply, only said in a general way that the levelling influence of margarine on society was simply immense. She added that it was this dreadful and secret burden under which society—at least so far as there is any society—is now staggering to its doom.

According to Maria it is this guilty secret which puts even a duchess at the mercy of her cook. A duchess, said Maria, might commit any number of crimes and it wouldn't make any difference, for she'd always remain an ornament to the aristocracy. But even a duchess couldn't

survive the plebeian scandal of having the ducal banquets cooked with margarine.

Mrs. Dill-Binkie, who, Maria handsomely admitted, seemed to her to have reached the top layer of the *crême-de-la-crême*, had for ever lost the social glamour that surrounded her at 11.30 that very morning, when she descended to the level of margarine.

"It would be as much as her reputation as a leader of fashion is worth," Maria spoke in a hushed voice, "for her servants or any one else to know. So that's the reason she fetches it herself every day by 'bus. So I rather guess she's scared to death of me." Maria spoke not without dramatic effect.

I waggled my head feebly as a tribute to Mrs. Dill-Binkie's departed greatness.

"However, I don't mind that," Maria remarked, not without condescension, "I'm

going to her lunch all the same, and I'm to sit next to the Duchess. She's promised."

So low had Mrs. Dill-Binkie fallen.

Of course Maria admitted that to sit next to a duchess in war hasn't the same social significance as to sit next to a duchess in peace, for people nowadays are so awfully mixed.

"But I do hope," she said earnestly as she rose to go and shook herself out, "that some day she'll call and leave her visiting-card."

As in a vision I saw the Duchess's card a permanent fixture at the very top of Maria's card tray.

And Maria arrayed herself for the Duchess. Language fails to describe the amazing smartness of her smartness. She was simply IT.

When she climbed Mrs. Dill-Binkie's drawing-room stairs, she gave a last tilt

to her chin, stretched her neck, stuck out her elbows and collided by accident with an awfully shabby old lady who was trying to pass her on the stairs—which was certainly rude—and who wore a bonnet that looked as if it had been sat on.

There are times, when she has her best clothes on, that Maria miscalculates her social importance. She spread herself across the stairs, looked over her shoulder, said " Sorry " down her nose, as if she were at least a princess of the Royal House, and then with a sprint she was the first to reach the war substitute for a butler. Later she wished she hadn't.

" Mrs. Smith ! " the war substitute announced in clarion tones, and somehow Maria wished the announcement had been less brief as she swayed forward to greet Mrs. Dill-Binkie with her best company smile.

" Her Grace the Duchess of Diddle Down

Derry," the clarion voice again rang out, and Mrs. Dill-Binkie, obviously recovered from the margarine incident, floated forward, a gratified hand outstretched, entirely overlooked Maria and Maria's, gloved in "Trefusse" quite regardless of expense. And with a touching sweetness—like the cooing dove—deposited her own in the Duchess' rusty black silk palm.

There are certain situations too dramatic even for the drama. This was one.

As if to add to her anguish, Maria also discovered that she was too smart. Poor Maria, who puts her whole innocent trust in the fashion books, and has never realized that there is an even higher fashion still, which stamps the mingler in the inner and most sacred shrine of society. For, after all, what do these immaculate ladies and gentlemen on the fashion plates really know of society? They are only out to sell!

So Maria, to her unspeakable agony of mind, found herself gloriously arrayed in the very latest of the wrong fashions and observed—to her added anguish—that the latest fashion, the only one recognized nowadays in the Inner Sanctuary, is to be indescribably shabby.

I felt for Maria when she darted in the very next morning at ten just as I was communing with the young butcher assistant who comes for orders, and who having been to the front and got permanently damaged has now been promoted to the high position of military critic to our whole terrace. His criticism of Hun methods are particularly valuable, being, as it were, by a colleague in the same line of business.

I ascended to Maria in the dining-room and found her marching up and down in a

rage such as I really never did, and which I felt was bad for the carpet.

"I've done it!" she cried tragically, "she'll never ask me again! She never put me anywhere near the Duchess! But at the other end between two women as stiff as Canterbury lamb and who talked across me all the time as if I didn't exist. War lunch!" and she gave an eloquent sniff.

"I was so mad that I simply shook, and I kept on shaking till we got to the butter and biscuits. Just then there was a kind of frozen pause, so I picked up a butter ball on the fork, leaned forward and caught Mrs. Dill-Binkie's eye and her Duchess's, and I said quite quietly but very distinctly, 'Still using margarine, dear Mrs. Dill-Binkie?'"

X

WAR NOTICE

X. WAR NOTICE

1916

MARIA brought in the "war special." She had bought it because of a desperate need for enlightenment on the subject of winter hats.

A national crisis might be upon us, but so was winter; and the war special ministered generously not only to worried patriots, but to the female inquirer after fashions. But before settling down to study the illuminating page devoted to what to put on one's head, she drank tea and ate war-cake.

Maria has a singularly detached outlook on the European conflict, so when I inquired what the headlines were—for I put my whole trust in headlines

—she said she didn't know. And she didn't.

She was so deep in the fashions that she paid no attention even to the flamboyant top which illuminates the front page of every well-conducted paper, but, instead, her eyes were riveted on that inspiring department which tells us what to wear and how to wear it. The prophetic discourse this time was however not about winter hats, but brides. And a bride in the choicest thing in millinery stared vacantly at Maria from the last page.

"Stylish!" was Maria's critical comment. "But I'm as sure as I can be that she looks more stylish here than she did in front of the altar. Brides are always disappointing except in picture-papers, and there they're sure to have on somebody else's face. Brides, too, are in such a dreadful hurry nowadays. Last week I

saw one who was so afraid she wouldn't get there in time to be married that she went up to the altar in her goloshes. It did look so odd in a Court train."

She studied the bridal costume with a microscopic interest in all its details. However, apart from the fashions and the columns devoted to kitchen crises, newspapers leave her cold. According to Maria, Samuel suffers from the pernicious newspaper habit which leads to goodness knows what, and Maria is dead against goodness knows what. So if more people were like her, our national Press would simply pine away and perish. Mercifully it survives.

In fact Maria looks on newspapers as of no other use than to be made into firelighters. Every evening punctually from 9 to 10.30 she sits in front of the dining-room table, and solemnly, as one having a high purpose, she rolls them into fire-

lighters. It is her contribution to our war economy. So, after all, even from her prejudiced point of view our national Press is not without its use.

Though Maria has no political curiosity she has a point of view which is occasionally instructive and usually unexpected.

Having exhausted every detail of the bridal costume, she turned to the front page and gave the arresting first line the tribute of a yawn. It would have broken the heart of the minor poet in Fleet Street responsible for this purple patch had he seen Maria yawn.

She was still yawning when her eye encountered the more or less libellous portrait with a cast-iron chin of the latest recipient of a war notice, conferred on him by his grateful Kaiser, the late illustrious chief of the German Imperial General Staff—General von Falkenhayn.

"Oh," I explained to Maria, "the Kaiser's just given him notice." I was sure she'd never heard of him, and she never had.

"Dear me," Maria exclaimed, not without feeling, "given him notice!" and it seemed to touch an answering chord in her being. "Why, just as if he were a cook. Think of it!"

I admitted the resemblance, but as I said to her: "No, Maria, not quite; his notice is set in diamonds."

"You don't say so!" and Maria examined the features of the illustrious sufferer, and then remarked that she wouldn't like to give that chin notice. "Chins like that," said Maria, "talk back."

I explained to her that the All-Highest now obviated this trifling drawback by bestowing his notice in writing. "The first time when in his innocent youth he

treated himself to a notice"—I thought it not out of place to give Maria a tit-bit from history—"it was answered by an inkstand, for the old gentleman who got it—the notice, I mean, not the inkstand—didn't like notices even if they were set in diamonds."

"Now I call that rude." Maria was quite shocked.

"That," I added impressively, "was Bismarck; he didn't mind being rude."

"Well, I never!" Maria exclaimed; "I wonder if he hurt the wallpaper?"

"Possibly," I admitted, "but the Kaiser knows better now; he writes."

"No wonder!" said Maria, "for it's awful to get out ink-stains unless you send 'em to the cleaners."

Such, however, was the impression made on her by a momentous political event.

"And now he's always giving notice—gives one every week. It's got to be a habit. Have some cake, Maria?"

"Well, I don't mind having a weeny bit more; thinking makes me so hungry. He isn't afraid," and Maria referred to the All-Highest. "I mayn't know much about armies and things like that, but I do know about giving notice."

To which I can testify; Maria is an expert.

"And just to think of giving notice makes me palpitate days before. But he really oughtn't to give notice so often. You can overdo it. It won't make him popular. I know. I never send a cook away that she doesn't talk."

It appears, after all, that the European conflict does not pass Maria by quite unheeded. She is, so to speak, a critic of the minor phases; a broader outlook is

denied her because of the foreign languages. They mix her all up.

"If they'd only pronounce 'em in English," was her not unnatural comment.

And yet Samuel tries his best to pronounce them in English, but with no success. Though I've heard him hopefully read the evening paper, just before it was turned into fire-lighters, and pound heroically across five foreign languages, only pausing at last in his wild career to scratch his head in anguish as he confessed that he had got all the armies hopelessly mixed.

It was then that I realised for the first time that the peaceful invasion of Albion is now accomplished, and that Great Britain is heroically learning a first tragic lesson in foreign languages which she will never forget—never.

Maria surveyed the illustrious Falkenhayn, and remarked that it was one of life's chief blessings, for which we can't be too thankful, that even the very high ups are sure to find still higher ups, sooner or later, ready and able to give them notice.

"Ain't it a mercy!" she spoke with real gratitude, and I then became aware that Maria had dropped into metaphor.

She instanced Mrs. Dill-Binkie as one who she hoped and prayed would yet get her come-up-'ems. Maria's longing for Mrs. Dill-Binkie's ultimate punishment is due to her not having sat next to the Duchess at lunch, which Mrs. Dill-Binkie had so solemnly promised her.

"It must be heavenly," she remarked as one entranced, "to be able to give notice to everybody all the time. But, of course, you have to be a Kaiser to do that. I

wonder," said Maria, "if his notices ever talk back! Mine do. Sometimes I wish I hadn't given notice at all, the next one's so much more dreadful than the last. Wonder if he feels like that?" and Maria referred to the War Lord.

I said it was more than likely. And I think it is; so did Maria after deep meditation.

"And the way one's taken in!" she added indignantly. "There was that nice-looking old gentleman who wore his white beard in two points. Looked just like a prophet, he did—so kind. But he wants to submarine us all the same. Isn't it dreadful? So I *am* glad the Kaiser gave him notice, though with a beautiful character he doesn't deserve. I read about it in a paper where there was the loveliest pattern of a new war skirt.

"I think his name is Tippetts—that

wicked old German's, I mean—and I can't help wondering if he's any relation to Sir Peter. It's just what I'd expect of Lady Tippett to have German relations. I think she ought to be interned; don't you? She's never been near me since we gave up our seats in her pew! Calls that religion!" and Maria palpitated with indignation.

"Sometimes I get so tried thinking of her that I just wish a Tank'd come down Westbourne Terrace and hit her! Serve her right!"

It was a harrowing picture.

"So I'm awfully glad the Kaiser's given him notice, for I'm sure they're related."

"But it's Tirpitz, Maria, not Tippetts," I corrected.

"I'll call it just what I please," Maria retorted. "Those horrid foreign names! Whenever a new war starts up with new

names it seems to me as if I couldn't stand it! It's perfectly dreadful now to hear Samuel doing Rumanian and Greece!"

Maria relieved herself of the illustrious Falkenhayn and planted him against the teapot for support.

Her opinion of him was that he was distinctly stylish, but, she added, "who wouldn't be in that uniform? As for his chin," she added, "she had met that kind of a chin before.

"Been reminding me of somebody, and now I know. It was a parlourmaid we had, only she gave me notice. She wouldn't stay because she couldn't put up with our silver. She said she didn't feel she ought to parlourmaid in a family whose silver's later than Queen Anne. She knew all about Queen Anne.

"I asked if Queen Victoria wouldn't do just as well, for we have lots of Queen

QUEEN ANNE OR QUEEN VICTORIA?

Victoria. We got seventeen toast-racks, all solid, when we married. But she said she hadn't any opinion of Queen Victoria as silver. And she couldn't think of spoiling her taste. So she gave a month's notice. Afterwards she married into a fried-fish shop."

Maria surveyed the great Falkenhayn. "Wonder what he'll do now! It's easy enough for cooks, for everybody's after cooks. But when there's only one situation going, and he's had notice——"

"Well, he's had his chance and now he's lost it," I remarked philosophically, "to Hindenburg. You remember?"

"Dear me, yes. The wooden old gentleman they pound nails into? You don't say so."

I looked at the illustrious sufferer from war notice. "And now he'll stay at home, and after dinner he'll put on his carpet

slippers, light his pipe and read his notice set in diamonds and his beautiful character and enjoy 'em."

"And perhaps," and Maria spoke like a prophetess, "he'll wonder when the wooden old gentleman's turn will come. And that he'll enjoy still more." There are times when Maria betrays an unexpected insight into our frail human nature.

"Poor old Kaiser," she said with feeling, for she's nothing if not broad. "I'm sure he's so worried nowadays he hardly remembers to whom he's given notice. I'm like that sometimes. He ought to have a tonic, and I'm sure it'd do him worlds of good if he could get someone to contradict him. I don't suppose he's ever been contradicted as long as he's lived. 'Tisn't healthy. When Samuel can't stand being contradicted I know he isn't well, and he

isn't. Liver. So I contradict him at once and it acts just like a tonic."

But I shook my head. You can't contradict crowned heads; they don't enjoy it, and then they're sure to give you notice. "But I think he's had a good try at it," and I looked not without sympathy at the illustrious sufferer against the teapot. "And I'm as sure as I can be he got his diamond notice and his beautiful character by return mail."

"Of course he did," Maria retorted warmly. "I always give a cook I'm dying to get rid of a beautiful character at once."

By which I realised that a bond of sympathy unites Maria and the All-Highest.

She held a piece of war-cake between her forefinger and thumb and looked dreamily at the injured Falkenhayn, slowly doubling up against the teapot.

o

"I wonder," and she was lost in thought, "I wonder—I can't help wondering——"

"Well, what about?"

"I'm wondering if anybody'd ever dare to give him notice?"

"But he's already had it, in diamonds ——"

"Oh, I don't mean him," and I regret to say that Maria spoke not without disdain. Alas! for the tragedy of the "Ex"!

"I mean the Kaiser."

I was aghast.

"What! The Kaiser? Give notice to the Kaiser?" For a moment I simply gasped. To think it was Maria's idea! Maria's! Then I rallied.

"Goodness gracious me!" and I stared at her in consternation, while she took the war special and rolled up General von Falkenhayn inside. "You can thank your lucky stars you aren't in Germany, or it

would be off with your head before you knew it."

"I was only wondering," Maria explained vaguely, and swished her skirts, pulled down her veil and gave a poke to her hat.

"And now I'm off to the dairy for two war-eggs. They're so small you'd suppose the hens are all on strike. And here I've been talking about nothing at all, and haven't yet found out a single thing about winter hats."

Maria skipped to the door, though she's really too old to skip. This is only a little friendly criticism. But she paused with her hand on the door-handle and looked back.

"I do wonder!" she said.

And so do I.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MARIA AGAIN

Crown 8vo. 3/6 *net.*

PRESS OPINIONS.

"There was no need for Mrs. Lane's apology for reappearing with the inimitable Maria in her train. . . . Mrs. Lane lightens the tragedy with a course of her mirth."—*Morning Post.*

"We shall never be tired of Maria. . . . We like 'Maria Again,' with Mr. Baumer's frontispiece, better than its predecessor . . . and we yield it the crowning compliment—it has made us forget the war."—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

"Our one and only Maria is with us again, and is as priceless as ever. In these sad times she comes as a boon and a blessing to men."—*Outlook.*

"In 'Maria Again' we have the very book of the season, a book that might very well be sent to soldiers at some of our outposts who want amusing reading. Mrs. Lane's creation of Maria is a very distinct literary achievement."—*Sphere.*

"In a word, Maria is a real creation."—*Nation.*

"There is only one Maria. We have a score of the most delightful chapters that only Mrs. Lane could write."
Bystander.

"Mrs. Lane has revived Maria, and by doing so has added refreshingly to the small store of comforts and entertainments of the present hour. Mrs. Lane must give us some more of these delicious sketches, which are among the best things of their class, buoyant, incisive, and infallibly good-humoured."
Daily Telegraph.

"To Mrs. Lane and her Maria we can offer a warm welcome. Her humour never offends, her cynicism never hurts, and her shrewd common sense is always worth thinking over. Every kind of subject is touched upon and amiably disposed of."—*Times.*

"Mrs. Lane is indeed to be congratulated on this further achievement in satirical portraiture."—*Globe.*

"You will be glad to learn that in this book Maria bobs up as serene, self-satisfied, and suburbanly sophisticated as ever."
Punch.

"The book is a delight all through, bubbling with high spirits, rich in epigram, and profitable for instruction."
Daily Graphic.

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, VIGO ST., W.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ACCORDING TO MARIA

Crown 8vo, Third Edition, price 6/-.

Also Cheap Edition, Cloth, Crown 8vo, 1/- *net.*

PRESS OPINIONS.

"Mrs. John Lane has never written anything more witty and amusing."—*St. James' Gazette.*

"Mrs. John Lane is a very genial satirist and 'According to Maria' is a satirical comedy that leaves a good taste in the mouth. Maria is a snob, but her snobbishness is lovable. . . . She is too delightfully simple and too adorably naïve to arouse evil passions."—JAMES DOUGLAS in *The Star.*

"A more entertaining, companionable, good-natured and yet critical piece of portraiture we have not had the good luck to encounter these many seasons. . . . 'According to Maria' is as fresh, amusing, and human a book as any man, woman or girl could desire to drive away a fit of the dumps. Long before they reach the end they will be wishing themselves back at the beginning."—*The Daily Telegraph.*

"Maria is a new authority on almost all things modern—and a delightful new authority in the hands of Mrs. Lane. . . . She is a delight and must be secured at once for every home."—*The Observer.*

"The story has all the brightness and wit we associate with the author. Indeed we expect the makers of extracts to be busy for the next week or two pilfering from Mrs. Lane's store of good things."—*The Athenæum.*

"Mrs. John Lane is a delightful writer, keenly observant, quick to mark pomposity, and yet essentially forbearing and sometimes even tender. One may predict for it ('According to Maria') with confidence a large measure of popularity."—"A MAN OF KENT" in *British Weekly.*

"This is a delicious book; you read it greedily from cover to cover, and then read it all over again, and enjoy it still better. 'According to Maria' is a gem of its kind, and its author is to be congratulated on the completeness and brilliancy of her achievement."—*The Globe.*

"Nobody who enjoys sparkling if rather merciless satire will have a dull moment while following Mrs. John Lane's ambitious Maria in her long climb. It would be possible to go on for a considerable time talking of Maria and quoting her own sayings and the reflections of Margery Brown, her dearest friend, an admirably indicated character. . . . But it is difficult to make a selection from so much anecdote and epigram."—*The Westminster Gazette.*

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, VIGO ST., W.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE CHAMPAGNE STANDARD

Crown 8vo, Cloth, Third Edition, 6/-.

PRESS OPINIONS.

"Mrs. Lane may congratulate herself on having that blessed sense of humour which is one of the most valuable possessions in life. In any case Englishwomen should be grateful to her for writing them this delightful candid book, which is full of original and bright ideas."—*Academy.*

"Mrs. Lane's 'Champagne' overflows with witty sayings too numerous to cite. . . . Her book will be read again and again." *Morning Post.*

"More men would be found at tea-parties if there were more women who could talk to them as Mrs. Lane talks to the public."—*Times.*

"Engagingly easy reading . . . an exceptionally pleasing volume."—*Daily Telegraph.*

KITWYK

With numerous Illustrations by HOWARD PYLE, ALBERT STERNE, and GEORGE WHARTON EDWARDS.

Crown 8vo, Cloth, 6/-

PRESS OPINIONS.

"Dip where one will into her sparkling pages, one is certain to find entertainment, and the charm of her little idylls is much assisted by the delightful illustrations."—*Daily Telegraph.*

"Mrs. Lane has succeeded to admiration. . . . She keeps the reader's interest as keenly alive as if he were really listening to an amusing story of what had once actually happened. Every one who seeks to be diverted will read 'Kitwyk' for its obvious qualities of entertainment."—*Times.*

"A very amusing and fascinating little book about life in Holland. . . . This little book shows exactly, in the only way that it can be done, by dint of a certain poetic gossip and a certain simple and garrulous patriotism, the real spirit of a people."—*Daily News.*

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, VIGO ST., W.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE

TALK OF THE TOWN

Crown 8vo, 6/-.

PRESS OPINIONS.

"Mrs. John Lane is rapidly acquiring the reputation of being one of the wittiest and most caustic writers of the day. In 'According to Maria' she scored a great success, which she bids fair to surpass in 'Talk of the Town.' For all that Mrs. Lane sets out chiefly to entertain, there is a world of wisdom wrapped up in her remarks. Mrs. Lane should be proud of a book which will be appreciated by all who love gentle satire."—*Daily Chronicle.*

"Mrs. John Lane pursues the course that made 'According to Maria' readable and a success. Her remarks are as shrewd as they are discursive, and as kindly as they are humorous. 'Talk of the Town' is quite excellent holiday reading."—*Standard.*

"*A volume that will in future rank with the immortal 'Rab.'*"

MANCHESTER COURIER.

PETERKINS

THE STORY OF A DOG

Translated from the German of OSSIP SCHUBIN

By MRS. JOHN LANE

With numerous Drawings by COTTINGTON TAYLOR

Crown 8vo, 3/6.

PRESS OPINIONS.

"A delicious story . . . full of genuine humour and character."—*Bystander.*

"A very pleasing dog . . . a most moving tale. . . . Mrs. Lane has done the history of his adventures into charming English . . . not the least of the book's attractions are the delightful drawings of Cottington Taylor."—*Daily Telegraph.*

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, VIGO ST., W.

PR
4175
L3W3

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Barbara

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW.

Series 9482

3 1205 02087 8425

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A A 001 424 010 5